State Library staff visits Russian libraries

Staff members from the Illinois State Library, the State Museum and Springfield’s Lincoln Public Library participated in a two-week library and museum exchange program in Russia in January.

The Mortenson Foundation of the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign and the Soros Foundation facilitated the program. Representing the State Library was Director Jean Wilkins; Mike Ragen, chief deputy director; Sharon Ruda, director of the library’s Talking Book and Braille Service; Bonnie Matheis and Carolyn Bodewes.

"Russia is a nation in transition," said Wilkins. "For a society that was once closed to new information and the outside world, the Russian people are eager to discover new ideas and resources. One of the most amazing aspects of our visit to libraries was that the reading rooms were always filled. Russia’s citizens are using their libraries in great numbers, which portends well for their future."

The group toured libraries and museums in Moscow, St. Petersburg, Tula, Suzdal, Guskhrustalny and Bogoroditsk, including:

Library of Foreign Literature

One of the highlights of the exchange program was a visit to the Library of Foreign Literature in Moscow. The library has more than 700 employees and was filled with patrons, mostly students. The library hosted a dinner for the Illinois visitors, during which the library’s director general and deputy director general discussed the struggles the library endured during the Soviet regime in building and maintaining a collection of resources. Like many American libraries, the Library of Foreign Literature faces funding and storage concerns. However, they welcome the new openness and intellectual freedoms that allow their library to fully serve the Russian people.

Bogoroditsk

In the small, rural city of Bogoroditsck south of Moscow, a meeting was held between the Americans and Russian library and cultural officials. The Russians were asked what they considered to be the biggest challenge they face as librarians. Their response was the need to keep their collections updated for legal information to be used by local government officials.

Russian National Library

The group toured the Russian National Library in St. Petersburg, which holds more than 35 million items. Among the more interesting items are original letters written by George Washington and Thomas Jefferson, which the Russians are very proud to have in their collection.

Wilkins said the exchange program was a remarkable educational experience for all those who participated. “Russian and American libraries face common challenges—the need for more space, updated technology and increased funding for operations. But the library communities in both nations are encouraged by the pivotal role that libraries are playing in the development of our communities.”
ISL staff attends Gates Foundation seminar

Eight State Library staff members attended an intensive, two-day seminar in Seattle in February on the computer grant program sponsored by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. The staff learned about the Gates Library Computer, logistics and technical support, on-site training and other details of the program, to be implemented in Illinois libraries beginning this spring.

The State Library spearheaded the effort to bring the Gates Library grant program to Illinois. The program is designed to provide computer and Internet access to library patrons in communities where at least 10 percent of the population lives below the federal poverty level. Some libraries will receive cash awards while others may purchase equipment with free software and support.

Gates Foundation staff will be on hand at hundreds of Illinois public libraries through August to help train librarians and install desktop computers and software.

National audience views 9/11 teleconference

Viewers from 28 states tuned in Feb. 13, as the Illinois State Library presented a free satellite teleconference to discuss how the events of Sept. 11 have affected libraries.

The teleconference, titled “September 11 Changed Our World; Has It Changed Our Libraries?” included panelists John Berry, president, American Library Association; Karen Coyle, information technology specialist, University of California’s Digital Library; Leigh Estabrook, director of the Library Research Center at the U of I-Urbana/Champaign; and Phil Lenzini, partner in the law firm of Kavanaugh, Scully, Sudow, White and Frederick.

Among the issues discussed were security and the Internet, the USA Patriot Act, enacted in the aftermath of the terrorist attacks, the Illinois Library Records Confidentiality Act and keeping libraries accessible and sources of complete and accurate information.

Estabrook discussed the results of a survey commissioned last December to determine how Illinois libraries responded to the worst terrorist attack ever on American soil. A total of 629 public libraries took part in the survey. Among the findings were:

• Only 24% of respondents said they had reviewed their building security since Sept. 11, with most small libraries insisting security was not a problem in their communities.
• In light of the anthrax incidents, 60% said they had instituted a new policy of discarding mail that did not contain a return address, and 33% said their staff members now use rubber gloves to open mail.
• Due to reports that some of the Sept. 11 terrorists had accessed library Internet terminals, 50% of survey respondents now require identification from patrons requesting use of the Internet, and 20% now limit access to some Web sites.
• 50% reported that new purchases for their collections were influenced by recent terrorist events, with some libraries purchasing materials relating to Islam and bioterrorism.
• 11 libraries reported that law enforcement officials have requested specific information about patrons since Sept. 11.

Estabrook said the Library Research Center at the U of I-Urbana/Champaign is conducting a national survey to determine how Illinois’ results compare with other states.
ILA requests nominations

Nominations are now being accepted for 15 Illinois Library Association awards to be presented during the 2002 ILA Annual Conference in September.

The awards recognize people and programs that have made a significant impact in Illinois libraries, their communities and their patrons throughout Illinois. You can help ensure that Illinois libraries — and those who make them a success — receive the recognition they deserve by submitting your nominations. The deadline for nominations is May 15, 2002.

Nomination forms and descriptions of the awards are available in the ILA Handbook of Organization and were published in the February issue of the ILA Reporter. You may also contact:

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Library Advocacy Day to focus on role of libraries in a free society

Library advocates traveling to Springfield for Library Advocacy Day on April 17 will focus their public policy efforts on promoting the crucial role of libraries in a free society.

“Following the tragic events of Sept. 11, 2001, we have witnessed a renewed sense of patriotism and a greater appreciation of our freedoms and democracy,” said Secretary of State and State Librarian Jesse White.

“Our libraries represent the very best of America. We welcome all citizens, and do not discriminate against anyone. While books and other forms of information and entertainment are banned in other countries, our collections are permanent reminders of America’s most cherished freedoms. Patrons can freely assemble in our libraries, and conduct meetings where free speech is unabated. It is important for us to keep our libraries strong, and maintain them as permanent symbols of our freedom.

“This is the message to be delivered to lawmakers this year. We will adopt an educational and marketing campaign focusing on issues such as the Digital Divide, raising the base of library services and information resources available to all citizens, and stressing the importance of funding maintenance for critical existing library programs.”

Librarians will meet at the Illinois State Library to hear speeches from White and other library advocates and administrators. The group will then walk across the street to the State Capitol to meet with their local senators and representatives.


HGTV book appraiser to be featured at Authors Book Fair

Although it’s still more than six months away, plans are under way for the Illinois Authors Book Fair on Nov. 16, 2002.

The State Library and the Illinois Center for the Book are proud to announce that one of the nation’s most popular and widely recognized book and manuscript appraisers, Tom Joyce, will be featured at the event and will appraise materials brought in by book fair visitors. Joyce of Chicago makes regular appearances on The Appraisal Fair, broadcast nationally 10 times a week on Home & Garden Television. He has been a professional antiquarian bookseller since 1973.

Joyce is the owner of a company that specializes in first-edition books, rare books and autographs, with specialties in local history, Americana, English and American literature, old medical and legal books, Sherlock Holmes and illustrated books. He has been profiled in the Chicago Tribune and has appeared on WGN Radio, WLS-TV and C-SPAN. He also has authored and co-authored numerous articles and books, including The Book Collector’s Handbook of Values. In addition, Joyce is a founding partner in the Chicago Rare Book Center and a member of The Experts Network of appraisals.com, an Internet appraisal service.

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— Jesse White
Secretary of State & State Librarian

Illinois Authors BOOK FAIR

“Our libraries represent the very best of America... It is important for us to keep our libraries strong and maintain them as permanent symbols of our freedom.”

— Jesse White
Secretary of State & State Librarian
EXPO 2002
The Illinois State Library’s Electronic Resource Expo drew a crowd of 200 library personnel to the Schaumburg Township District Library on February 27.
Representatives from academic, public, school and special libraries statewide evaluated products, offered suggestions for enhancements and heard about the future of electronic databases.