The Illinois State Library will soon be known as the Gwendolyn Brooks Illinois State Library. The Illinois General Assembly approved a resolution in April naming the State Library in memory of the late Pulitzer Prize winner and longtime Illinois poet laureate.

On June 6, a dedication ceremony will be held at the library, featuring speakers Secretary of State and State Librarian Jesse White, Senate President Emil Jones Jr., House Speaker Michael Madigan, state Rep. Lovana Jones and Springfield Mayor Tim Davlin. Mrs. Nora Brooks Blakely, the late poet’s daughter, will speak on behalf of the Brooks family. A dedication plaque will be unveiled and permanently displayed in the library’s atrium.

“Gwendolyn Brooks was a national treasure who enriched the lives of everyone she encountered,” said Secretary White. “We are proud and honored that she spent her entire life in Illinois. It is fitting that her name will be permanently attached to the State Library because her poems are some of the most extraordinary literary works of the 20th century.”

Brooks began creating rhyming verses at age 7, and she was 13 when one of her poems was published in American Childhood magazine. Her first book of poetry, A Street in Bronzeville, was published in 1945, and in 1950 at age 32, she became the first African-American to win a Pulitzer Prize for her book-length poem, Annie Allen, chronicling African-American life in Chicago.

In 1969, Brooks was named Illinois poet laureate, replacing the late Illinois poet Carl Sandburg. Brooks created the Illinois Poet Laureate Award for primary and secondary school students. Her other honors included 90 honorary college degrees, recipient of the Frost Medal, member of National Women's Hall of Fame and appointment to the American Academy of Arts and Letters. Brooks received the National Medal of Arts in 1995, and shortly before her death in December 2000 at age 81, the Library of Congress named her a “Living Legend.” She spent the last 11 years of her life as a distinguished professor of literature at Chicago State University.

All told, Brooks wrote 22 books of poetry, and her works are included in countless anthologies. In 1990, she attended the grand opening of the Illinois State Library, and in 1996 was the featured author of the State Library’s Illinois Authors Book Fair. Brooks is one of 35 Illinois authors whose names are engraved on the fourth-floor frieze of the State Library.

The Illinois State Library to be named after Gwendolyn Brooks
Library community rallies at Advocacy Day

Nearly 400 members of the Illinois library community gathered at the State Library on April 9 for the annual Library Advocacy Day. Illinois Library Association lobbyist Kip Kollmeier briefed attendees on legislation affecting the library community. State Library Director Jean Wilkins addressed participants with remarks prepared by Secretary of State and State Librarian Jesse White, who was unable to attend because he was being briefed on the governor's 2004 budget, to be delivered to the public at noon that day.

“More patrons are using our libraries than ever before,” Wilkins said, reading from White’s remarks. “Libraries play an important role in our communities, especially at times like these. Studies indicate that library usage goes up during difficult economic times, because people looking for work rely on libraries for research. Many families of our brave military personnel are using library Internet services to exchange e-mails. Citizens eager to learn more about current events are visiting libraries, where they can find newspapers, magazines and books with pertinent information. Much of the credit for the ever-growing usage and popularity of our libraries goes to you, the men and women who work at Illinois’ 4,000 academic, public, school and special libraries.”

Advocacy Day participants watched Gov. Blagojevich deliver his budget address via video webcast in the State Library’s atrium. Afterwards, they headed across the street to the State Capitol to ask local lawmakers for their support of state funding for libraries.

Library Advocacy Day is sponsored by the Illinois State Library, the ILA, the Illinois Library System Directors Organization and the Illinois State Library Media Association.

State Library receives $6 million in LSTA funds

The good news arrived in late March that the Illinois State Library will receive $6 million in Library Services and Technology Act (LSTA) funds to help Illinois libraries create new programs and services, share collections, holdings and statewide databases, train library staff and expand the role of networks, consortia and partnerships.

“LSTA grants are some of the most important types of funding the State Library distributes each year,” said Secretary of State Jesse White. “At a time when financial resources at both the state and federal levels are limited, I am pleased that Congress recognizes how important our libraries are and voted to appropriate these funds, which are essential to the operation of Illinois libraries. The Illinois Congressional Delegation has been extremely supportive of the LSTA, and the library community appreciates their efforts.”

The grants are made available through the federal Institute of Museum and Library Services based on a state’s population. The Illinois State Library distributes the grants to academic, school and special libraries in the state.

“Letters About Literature” winners announced

Nine student winners have been selected from nearly 5,000 Illinois entries in the 2003 “Letters About Literature” contest, sponsored by the Center for the Book in the Library of Congress, the Weekly Reader Corporation, the Illinois Library Association, the Illinois School Library Media Association, and the Illinois Library System Directors Organization and the Illinois School Library Media Association. The contest is supported by the Children’s Book Council.

Each year, students write letters to authors whose books have made a difference in their lives. The contest promotes reading and thinking about what the author is trying to communicate. First place winners in each level receive a $25 savings bond and a plaque. Second place winners receive a framed certificate, and third-place winners receive a certificate. Winners and their parents will have the opportunity to meet Secretary of State and State Librarian Jesse White, who serves as honorary chairman of the Illinois Center for the Book.

Level I – Grades 1-3

1st place — Jennifer Whitfield, West Chicago Elementary School, West Chicago
Wrote to Dr. Atkins, author of “Dr. Atkins New Diet.”
2nd place — Andy Anderson, Dunlap High School, Dunlap
Wrote to James Rizzi, author of “Rizzi.”
3rd place — Chelsea Idol, Beach Park School, Beach Park
Wrote to Jennifer Haag, author of “Lovejoy Library.”

Level II – Grades 4-6

1st place — Janae’ Dearing, Deer Creek Elementary School, Deer Creek
Wrote to Beverly Cleary, author of “Dear Mr. Henshaw.”
2nd place — Joselyn Simms, Edwardsville Middle School, Edwardsville
Wrote to Kathleen Duey, author of “Janey G. Blue.”
3rd place — Casey Erin Hill, Aven Center School, Round Lake Beach
Wrote to Alvin H. Carter, author of “I’m Tougher Than Asthma.”

Level III – Grades 7-8

1st place — Illiana Miranda, Berwyn Central High School, Berwyn
Wrote to Anke De Vries, author of “Brueser.”
2nd place — Josh House, Brookwood Junior High School, Glenwood
Wrote to Robert Atkins, author of “Dr. Atkins New Diet.”
3rd place — Andy Anderson, Dunlap Middle School, Dunlap
Wrote to Kimberly Holifield, author of “When Zachary Beaver Came to Town.”

Level IV – Grades 9-12

1st place — Kristin Ginger, Glenbard West High School, Glen Ellyn
Wrote to Janet Fitch, author of “White Oleander.”
2nd place — Spirit Nwosu, Honors English, Glenbard West High School, Glen Ellyn
Wrote to Katica Petrucci, author of “I Must Hurt A Lot.”
3rd place — Jacqueline Spreen, Crystal Lake High School, Crystal Lake
Wrote to Doris Santo, author of “When Zachary Beaver Came to Town.”

Second Synergy class convenes

The second class of Illinois librarians chosen for the State Library’s Synergy: the Illinois Library Leadership Initiative held its first three-day seminar in March at Starved Rock Lodge in Utica. Synergy seminars focus on personal and professional development, ways to be better community leaders and the future of the library profession. Additional seminars will be held in July at Pere Marquette Lodge in Grafton and in January 2004 in Lisle. Following are the 10 participants attending in this year’s Synergy seminars:

1st place: Crystal Ely, Public Library, Minooka
2nd place: Luz M. Almendarez, Library Director, Aurora
3rd place: Carol Weimer, Library Director, Peru

Participants expressed their appreciation for learning how to be better leaders in Illinois libraries, and made suggestions for future seminars.

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Conference topics included copyright basics, care and handling of library materials, grant-writing tips, the USA Patriot Act and what it means for libraries, interlibrary loan basics, how to handle disruptive patrons, new issues and new library technologies.

The Illinois OCLC Users Group sponsored a chocolate reception at the State Library, during which library staff provided tours of the building. A special thanks goes out to all the enthusiastic participants who make the conference an overwhelming success!
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Second-place winners received a framed certificate, and third-place winners received a certificate.Winners and their parents will have the opportunity to meet Secretary of State and State Librarian Jesse White, who serves as honorary chairman of the Illinois Center for the Book.

Level I – Grades 4-6

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Wrote to Beverly Cleary, author of Dear Mr. Henshaw.
2nd place — Joselyn Simms • Edwardsville Middle School, Edwardsville
Wrote to Kathleen Duve, author of Janey G. Blue, Pearl Harbor.
3rd place — Casey Erin Hill • Avon Center School, Round Lake Beach
Wrote to Alden R. Carter, author of I’m Tougher Than Asthma.

Level II – Grades 7-8

1st place — Illana Miranda • Burling School, Chicago
Wrote to Anke De Vries, author of Bruses.
2nd place — Josh House • Brookwood Junior High School, Glenwood
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Laura Birmingham
Biegler Library, IIT - Rice Campus, Wheaton

Carol Steuber
Plainfield Public Library District

Sheree Kozel-La Ha
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Jocelyn Tipton
Booth Library, Eastern Illinois University, Charleston

Laura Tolone
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The Bushnell Public Library District recently was awarded an LSTA “Dream Again” grant by Secretary of State Jesse White. The library developed an economic development program called “Libraries Lead the Way” to help people starting new businesses or expanding existing ones. The celebration included a business fair featuring information about how to start a business.