

Volunteer

Volunteers Get Earful of Information at March Meeting

THERE WAS MUCH to learn about what is happening at NYPL at For Our Ears Only, the first informational meeting that included the branch volunteers. The meeting on March 18 featured several speakers addressing a broad range of topics.

New Deputy Director of Public Service Kevin Winkler, moving to this position after 17 years at the Library for the Performing Arts, explained that public service covers everything we do directly with the public. Public service people include everyone from reference librarians to checkout clerks to, very definitely, volunteers. Kevin reported on the Library's ongoing project to digitize fragile materials, which become degraded if left untreated, and said that although more and more material will be digitized, we will always have print. He also noted the devastating \$33 million cut to libraries in the mayor's proposed budget.

Maura Muller provided distressing details about the proposed budget cuts. A \$33 million reduction would mean, among other impacts: library hours slashed from six to three or four days a week; \$9 million less for books and other materials; 17,000 fewer programs and classes with 500,000 fewer people served; 650 staff positions eliminated. Both Kevin and Maura acknowledged that some of the proposed funding cuts would not actually go through. They reminded volunteers that the upcoming letter writing campaign can be a powerful influence on budget-cutting issues.

An informative presentation by Michael Lascarides of the Library's strategy office described the Library's growing presence on the Internet. He headed up the first total redesign of the NYPL Web site, an enormous effort that required moving more than 9,000 pages of information. Volunteers who worked on the testing phase of the new site reported more than 150

problems, all of which were corrected!

Michael said the Library is on Facebook, Twitter, and Flickr and is attracting thousands of potential patrons. For instance, as of mid-March, more than 25,000 people followed us on Twitter, about 200 being added every day.

Perhaps most exciting are the blogs (online columns) being

written by librarians on topics of interest to them, including book reviews, literary essays, and community outreach information (the earthquake in Haiti for example). Some blogs are picked up by Web sites with huge readerships, and their thousands of readers follow the link provided to the NYPL Web site. You can read some of the blogs at nypl.org/blog.

Several members of the audience commented on problems with the new online catalog, pointing out serious difficulties for users. Michael explained that NYPL is well aware of the problems and is working every day with the company that created the catalog to correct them. (Unlike the Web site, which was created by NYPL, the catalog is the work of an outside contractor.)

Volunteer Alert
You are needed to help keep the library open and equipped to serve the public. Our letter-writing campaign to urge the mayor not to cut millions from the budget begins May 1. Take part in this important effort to help NYPL. Notify the volunteer office the dates you can serve.

—Adrienne Hickey

Volunteers Tutor Adult Students

Centers for Reading and Writing (CRW) is an extraordinary NYPL program in which specially trained volunteers help adults learn to read and write. The program exists in eight branches of NYPL and is free to the public. The Aguilar Library on East 110th Street is one of the CRW sites. Elaine Sohn, Aguilar site advisor, explains that volunteers and students bond and focus on the foundations of reading and writing skills. New students are accepted four times a year. Many come from different countries and are learning English as their second language.

Former Aguilar student Munira Pulodi is from Tajikistan. She was in the program for eight months and recently left to start her first semester of college working toward a career in the nursing field.

Edna Konoff and Lena Hayes are two of the many volunteer tutors at Aguilar. Edna has been tutoring at the Center for nearly two years. "It's very exciting to see people who can't read when they begin at the CRW progress within the program," says Edna. Lena Hayes has been tutoring at Aguilar for about a year-and-a-half. She assists another tutor in a small group and works individually with students as well. Lena says that it is satisfying and rewarding to watch her students "get it."

Standardized tests are given to the students throughout the year to monitor their progress and assist tutors in designing their group instruction. Eighteen computers have special software to help students improve individually and supplement their group instruction.

Students' writings are compiled into Center journals and are also submitted to writing competitions. The works of two Aguilar students will be published in NYU's prestigious *Literacy Review* this spring. The Aguilar program also offers art literacy, which includes visits to theatrical and cultural events, and workshops on writing poetry, plays, and photo essays.

"I wish more volunteers would try it," says tutor Lena Hayes. Tutor training takes place two or three times a year. Volunteers are supported by the professional staff as they work with students in the CRWs. To learn more about this volunteer program, go to the Web site www.nypl.org/events/classes/crw

—Crystal Sewer

Volunteers' Diary

On Thursday, January 21, Ilse Haefele and Yvonne Seck were at the information desk in the McGraw Rotunda. It was fairly quiet until the patter of little feet and the twitter of little voices caught our attention. A class of excited first graders with teachers and chaperones shushing them were touring the Library, led by a staff member.

As they were waiting to go into the Reading Room, the volunteers noticed one boy giggling and whispering to another classmate. He was pointing up toward the ceiling at that colorful mural of Prometheus stealing the gift of fire from the gods. In a whisper loud enough for us to hear, he said, "Look they's not wearing any pants!"

That scrap of information passed through the group like a hot knife cutting through butter. Suddenly, all we could see was a group of giggling children's upturned faces. Hardly able to contain their own laughter, the volunteers called one of the teachers over and pointed out what had caught the children's attention. Ilse, Yvonne, and the teacher had a good laugh, making up scenarios of what the parents' reaction would be when their children reported on their field trip to the Library.

—Yvonne Seck

Did You Know?

Our neighbor, The Morgan Library and Museum, offers NYPL volunteers and staff complimentary entry to their house of treasures. Simply show your NYPL ID at the entrance.

Visionary Works of Women Photographers

Two striking photography exhibitions are on display through May 23 in the third floor galleries of the Stephen A. Schwarzman Building.

In Passing, in the Stokes Gallery, pays tribute to three outstanding women photographers who died last year. Presented in conjunction with the 30th anniversary of the National Women's History Project, the exhibition features three dozen masterful works, all from the Library's collection.

Evelyn Hofer, born in Marburg, Germany, in 1922, came to New York in 1946. Considered a pioneer in color photography, she used a large-format view camera to capture portraits and places around the world. The photos on view include *Shakespeare's London*, *Detail in a Spanish Cemetery, Barcelona*, and *Italian Family, Bergamo*.

Helen Levin, born in Brooklyn in 1913, was a master of street photography and was called the unofficial visual poet laureate of New York City. The exhibition offers a sample of works from her series, *A Way of Seeing*, photographed in 1940, with striking black-and-white images of individuals and groups in their street environment.

Lilo Raymond, born in Frankfurt, Germany, in 1922, came to New York in 1939 and published her first book of photographs 50 years later. The black-and-white photos on view first appeared in that book and feature evocative views of everyday domestic objects. They include *Bed, Stratford*; *Pears in Bowl*; and *Laundry, Florida*.

The Print Gallery offers *Picture Perfect: Laurie Simmons, Photographs 1976-78*. Simmons' work is known for objectifying people in staged settings. Many of these early black-and-white photographs recreate a mythic 1950s suburbia, in domestic scenes with a solitary figurine of a woman. The effect is eerie, dreamlike, and at once touching and witty. Representative titles are *Woman Listening to Radio* and *Woman/Kitchen/Sitting on Sink*. Born in Long Island in 1949, Simmons lives and works in New York City. Her

photographs have been exhibited in major museums throughout the country. These works are from the Miriam & Ira Wallach Division of Art, Prints, and Photographs.

—Adrienne Hickey



Photographer Lilo Raymond's Pitcher, New York

The camera is an instrument that teaches people how to see without a camera.

—Dorthea Lange

Know Your Volunteers

In the fall of 1938, a young woman escaping from Nazi Germany stepped off a boat in New York harbor to begin a new life. She was 20 years old, penniless, and alone, except for an 88-year-old great uncle who had provided the visa allowing her to enter the United States. Three days later, she had a secretarial job, earning \$12 a week.

That young woman was Irma Rosenberg, now Irma Levy, who has been an NYPL volunteer for 17 years. Here is Irma's remarkable story.

Born and educated in Hamburg, Irma grew up in an affluent, close-knit Jewish family. Her father was a successful businessman; her two



PHOTO: PAT GRANT

Irma Levy assists a visitor at the Astor Hall information desk.

brothers studied law; she earned her baccalaureate and took courses in English and French at Berlitz. All that ended when the Nazis came to power. Suddenly the family went from a life of privilege and comfort to a struggle for survival. "I grew up fast," Irma remembers.

The family scattered—one brother to France in 1934, the other to West Africa in 1936, father and mother to Paris in 1939. When the Germans invaded Paris, Irma's mother and brother fled to southern France. Her father remained in Paris, where he was "safe" because the Germans did not arrest anyone over the age of 70. He died there a few years later. Irma's mother and brother escaped—separately—and arrived in the United

States in 1941. Her other brother came here after the war.

In New York, Irma proved her abilities, aided by her excellent command of English and a determination to move ahead. Her break-through job came when she joined Continental Grain at a salary of \$20 a week ("terrific at that time," she recalls). She worked there and at a subsidiary firm for 40 years, retiring as a manager in 1979. After she retired, says Irma, "I didn't do a darned thing. I enjoyed myself."

Much of that enjoyment included her husband, Howard, whom she had married in 1949. They moved to Forest Hills in 1955, and Irma remains in the same house today. The couple loved opera, classical music concerts, theater, and excursions into the nearby countryside. After Howard retired, they traveled abroad extensively.

Like many NYPL volunteers, Irma has always loved books. After Howard's death, she looked for a way to apply some of her energy and experience to public service and gravitated to the Library. She has been an enthusiastic, knowledgeable presence at the Astor Hall and third floor information desks since 1993. She also served on the Welcoming Committee. Meeting people from different places and walks of life is what she likes most about NYPL. "I have plenty of friends," she says, "but they are all like me. I like to talk to people of different backgrounds and interests." She takes obvious delight in helping Library patrons make the best of their Library experience.

Irma regularly attends operas, concerts, and plays, loves museums and restaurants, and has many friends, some since her youth in Germany. She likes to bake for friends and family living in the New York area. Recently her three-year-old great-great niece said to her, "Auntie Irma, you're old." Responded Irma, "I'm not old. I'm ancient!"

A flash of humor from this formidable woman who turned 93 last December.

—Adrienne Hickey

Branching Out: Andrew Carnegie's Legacy

“Mr. Carnegie’s offer stuns city officials,” read a headline in the *NY Telegram* on March 16, 1901. Carnegie’s stunning offer was to build 65 libraries in NYC: 42 in Manhattan, the Bronx, and Staten Island; 20 in Brooklyn; 3 in Queens. As he wrote to NYPL Director Dr. John Shaw Billings, “I should deem it a rare privilege to be permitted to furnish the money for the buildings, say \$5,200,000.” In today’s money that’s roughly equivalent to an astronomical \$2.7 billion.

Born poor in Scotland in 1835, Andrew Carnegie immigrated to Pennsylvania with his family at age 12. From his first jobs as a bobbin boy in a cotton mill and a telegrapher, he eventually founded the Carnegie Steel Co, later U. S. Steel. After the sale of his company he devoted his life to philanthropy.

Carnegie was an enthusiastic reader (especially Shakespeare and Burns) and formed an early interest in libraries when a wealthy man in Pittsburgh made his private library available to working boys every Saturday night. At age 33 he wrote an assessment of his life (in a document now part of NYPL’s Manuscripts and Archives) in which he resolved to spend his surplus money “for benevolent purposes.” Among his many other projects and causes, he built nearly 3,000 libraries in 47 states and several countries.

Carnegie agreed to build NYC’s libraries if the city would donate the land and maintain the buildings. Most Manhattan branches were built mid-block and consisted of three stories, with circulation and reference desks on the ground level, the children’s room on the second floor, and the reading room on top. In other boroughs, where real estate was cheaper, corner lots and more spacious interiors were possible. Sixty-seven libraries were built, and today 54 are still libraries. Yorkville on East 79th Street was the first to open, and Hunt’s Point in the Bronx was the last Carnegie branch. (See separate story on newest NYPL non-Carnegie branch.)

The ambitious project was not without controversy. The conservative newspaper *Sun* said reading diverted people from character-building duties and experience. The social satirist Mr.



The busy Webster library on East 79th Street was the first Carnegie branch of NYPL.

Dooley—aka Finley Peter Dunne —said “... a Carnegie library is archytechoor not lithrachoor.”

Carnegie’s critics accused him of supporting his philanthropy on the backs of his workers in the steel industry. The infamous Homestead Strike of 1892 permanently damaged his reputation. After the lockout of the union and the hiring of scabs, seven strikers were killed in a conflict with Pinkerton agents, who lost three men. When the union members had no choice but to return to work, their wages were reduced and their hours increased. More profits, more philanthropy.

NYC was Carnegie’s home for the last 50 years of his life. Always nattily dressed, he was frequently seen walking around the reservoir. Often he wore a top hat and high-heeled boots to compensate for his stature of just over five feet. He married late, at age 51, and had one daughter. Family photos show him standing on higher ground.

Unlike most robber barons, Carnegie left New York positive evidence of his wealth and generosity. The Carnegie Corporation, under the current presidency of Vartan Gregorian (a former President of NYPL), was established to give away the

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PHOTO: JON PACE

NYPL's newest library, the Battery Park City branch which opened March 18, was built with emphasis on environmental correctness.

Battery Park City Library Went for the Green

NYPL's newest branch opened March 18 in Battery Park City. It is a bright, 10,000 square-foot, two-story unit housing 23,626 items; separate reading areas for children, young adults, and adults; and 36 public computers. It also features a multipurpose room and outdoor spaces.

Designed by the firm I100 Architect, the Battery Park City branch was constructed with a focus on environmental sustainability. It is the first green LEED-certified branch in Manhattan. (The Bronx Library Center is the only other LEED branch in the NYPL system.) LEED (Leadership in Energy & Environmental Design) certification ensures that a building has met rigidly defined standards to merit green designation.

Some of the LEED components featured in the BPC branch are technologically advanced low energy heating/cooling system; low energy lighting system; recycled and renewable building materials including a wood floor constructed with off-cuts from window frame manufacture; carpets made from old truck tires; and terrazzo with recycled glass.

Since the library is housed in a large residential building, it can also take advantage of that building's solar energy collection, water re-use, and rain-water collection.

—Trudi Coakley

Wanted: Volunteer Exercise Leaders

Would you like to help others get in better shape by leading exercise classes in a neighborhood library—and enjoy some exercise yourself at the same time? Here is your chance!

The New York City Department for the Aging (DFTA) offers regular exercise classes in many senior centers. Recently NYPL has started partnering with DFTA to offer the same classes for those 50+ in Branch Libraries, and they have been enthusiastically received. The sessions are led by committed volunteers who receive on-site training, then lead weekly sessions. No prior experience is necessary.

We want to expand the number of branches offering these classes and have scheduled several sample sessions that will give you an opportunity to do the exercises with a DFTA trainer and hear more about the program.

No pre-registration—just come prepared to join in and exercise! If you decide you would like to be a volunteer leader, leave your contact information. The library will contact you when the training sessions are set up.

Here are the sessions currently scheduled:

- Tuesday, April 27, 3 PM
Riverside Library
127 Amsterdam Avenue (at West 65th Street)
- Thursday, April 29, 2 PM
Inwood Library
4790 Broadway (near Dyckman Street)
- Friday, May 7, 2 PM
Epiphany Library
228 East 23rd Street
- Thursday, May 13, 2 PM
Muhlenberg Library
209 West 23rd Street (near Seventh Avenue)
- Thursday, June 3, 2 PM
Seward Park Library
192 East Broadway (at Jefferson Street)

—Brigid Cahalan

SAVE THE DATE

COME PARTY WITH US

VOLUNTEER RECOGNITION DAY

WEDNESDAY, JUNE 30

5:30 PM – 7:30 PM

AWARDS, PRIZES, REFRESHMENTS,
OLD FRIENDS AND NEW

VOLUNTEERS OF THE NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

Editor: Adele Paroni

Production: Joyce Anderson

Designer: Mary Ratcliffe

Photographers: Pat Grant, Jon Pace

With: Brigid Cahalan, Trudi Coakley, Adrienne Hickey, Margaret Kable, Yvonne Seck, Crystal Sewer

Officers of the Volunteers:

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Library Staff:

Maura Muller, Volunteer Manager

Ayoela Charles, Volunteer Assistant

Branching Out: Andrew Carnegie's Legacy

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money Carnegie was unable to distribute during his lifetime, and the Carnegie Council on Ethics and International Affairs promotes world peace and global justice. Familiar to all New Yorkers are Carnegie Hall and his mansion on Fifth Avenue and 91st Street, now the Cooper-Hewitt Museum. No accomplishment can compare, however, with NYPL's neighborhood branches, which have provided education, inspiration, and entertainment for New Yorkers for more than 100 years.

—Margaret Kable

What Made You Decide To Become a NYPL Volunteer?

Loretta Dachman LPA 1 Year

When I moved to midtown Manhattan from Brooklyn in 2008, I was very disappointed to learn that my neighborhood branch, the Donnell Library, was closing down. I wanted to give something back to my neighborhood, and since I have always had a strong interest in the arts, I volunteered at LPA, the Library for the Performing Arts. Following a series of training sessions, I was assigned to serve at the information desk and also to help with other activities as needed, such as the electronic reader survey. The work is very rewarding, and I love meeting and helping people.

VOLUNTEERS

Is your branch a Carnegie building?

The newsletter would like to hear about your programs and your activities there.

E-mail us: volunteer@nypl.org



Volunteers of The New York Public Library
Fifth Avenue and 42nd Street, New York, NY 10018-2788