Ethiopia’s Storybook Hero

By Janet Lee

Yohannes Gebregeorgis, founder of Ethiopia Reads, was the first recipient of the ALA Presidential Citation for International Innovation, an honor bestowed upon him by his former University of Texas professor and then ALA President Loriene Roy in 2008.

Born in rural Ethiopia, Yohannes successfully managed to put himself through school. With the country in turmoil, he was forced to flee to the U.S. in 1981 and ultimately gained citizenship. He completed a Bachelors degree, a Masters in Library Science at the University of Texas, and landed a position as a children’s librarian at the San Francisco Public Library. Surrounded by children’s books in 75 different languages, he couldn’t help but anguish over the reality that children in Ethiopia had no access to books.

In 1998, he founded Ethiopia Reads, a non-profit organization with the mission of making books available to Ethiopian children. Ethiopia Reads has published a number of bilingual children’s books, including the popular Silly Mammo, the first English/Amharic book based on a traditional children’s folk tale in Ethiopia and written by Yohannes.

In 2002, he left his position at San Francisco Public Library and returned to Ethiopia with 15,000 books donated by the San Francisco Children’s Library. These served as the core collection for a library he started in the first floor of his home in Addis Ababa. The library quickly outgrew his house and the Shola Children’s Library was opened in 2003. In 2007, the library moved again, to a newer and bigger facility. Statistics from 2007 show that over 200,000 children have visited since 2003.

Under the auspices of Ethiopia Reads, Yohannes also established the Awassa Reading Center, a literacy center located in the regional capital of Awassa (4 hours southwest of Addis Ababa). The center is very popular with children of all ages. Based out of Awassa, the first of its kind Donkey Mobile Library makes weekly visits to remote areas. A sort of book-mobile pulled by donkeys, the Donkey Mobile Library has reached numerous children who would not otherwise be able to have books. Since 2006, Ethiopia Reads has also partnered with public and government schools to open 10 free school libraries. He has ambitious but reachable goals of planting many more libraries, including Donkey Mobile Libraries, across the country.

Another initiative is the Ethiopian Children’s Book Week, celebrated April 1-7 of every year. The Golden Kuraz Award is presented biannually during this celebration to honor an illustrated Ethiopian children’s book.

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Message from the Editor

An inspirational story leads off this issue: a man who had a vision of providing access to books to Ethiopian children and who has made that vision a reality. Janet Lee presents Yohannes Gebregeorgis, founder of Ethiopia Reads, and the wonderful program and activities of this non-profit - including donkey-powered book-mobiles!

Two articles in this issue focus on efforts in librarianship education. The first, by Alan Hopkinson and Tigran Zargaryan, describes a consortium set up of five European LIS programs to assist the development of six LIS programs in Armenia, Georgia and Uzbekistan. Although there are currently LIS programs in these countries, they are not meeting the demands of the profession. The consortium will address these demands by remodeling the programs through adoption of appropriate European curricula.

Megan Beard describes the first LIS program available in the Republic of Palau and the success of its first four graduates. The program provides training at the associate’s level, offering librarians a chance to formalize their education as librarians and launch both educational and professional careers. It is exciting to learn about LIS education improvements around the world!

Another contribution comes from our own Chair Elect, Sha Li Zhang. She reports on her experience at the 10th annual Library Society of China meeting, held in Chongqing City, China. The conference was particularly meaningful given its location in close proximity to Sichuan Province, locale of a 8.0 earthquake in summer 2008. The stories of librarians who survived the earthquake and the assistance provided by the Chinese American Librarians Association are inspirational.

As with every June issue, the program for IRRT and IRC at ALA Annual is highlighted. This year is especially exciting because we will celebrate the 60th anniversary of IRRT! I hope many of you will be able to join us.

This issue is my final one as editor. It has been a pleasure to edit this publication to IRRT membership for the last two years. I have enjoyed providing stimulating articles and notifications about current international topics of interest to members. It has been a rewarding experience and I wish all the best to the next editor.

~ Rebecca L. Miller

Call for Submission

Do you have news about...

International library activities?

People in international librarianship?

Upcoming international conferences?

International partnerships between libraries?

Then why not submit it to International Leads?  
Send your news to intl.leads.irrt@gmail.com for consideration.
Message from the IRRT Chair

By Judith Lin Hunt

I have always thought that former ALA President Barbara Ford’s theme of “Global Reach, Local Touch” was a certainly something that we should all embrace. In April, the New Jersey Library Association’s annual conference did just that, featuring a presentation about the Lubuto Library Project by Jane Kinney Meyers, its President and Founder. “The Lubuto Library Project grew from a librarian’s work with street children living in Zambia, Africa, where a library housed in a shipping container dramatically changed their lives. Now Lubuto, with support from many prominent professionals and organizations, builds libraries that offer an array of services to Africa’s children, along with carefully selected collections…. Learn about these groundbreaking efforts and how you may contribute.” It was exciting to see a room filled with New Jersey academic, public, school, and special librarians learning about libraries in Africa. Learn more about other very inspiring and worthy projects on the IRRT’s International Sustainable Library Development Interest Group’s website. (http://www.lubuto.org and http://tinyurl.com/omxhts)

What if each state library conference were to include one international program each year?! And if each library were to include the Campaign for the World’s Libraries (@ your library) as part of its activities and publicity?! (http://www.ifla.org/en/at-your-library) And if each ALA Student Chapter was an IRRT affiliate? (http://tinyurl.com/bsyczu and http://tinyurl.com/qzhhgq). We would all be reaching out globally with our local touch!

We can all reach out this special year, IRRT’s 60th anniversary, at ALA’s annual conference in Chicago: a pre-conference, orientation/mentoring program, poster session, chair’s program and many more programs with an international focus and the very special International Librarians Reception! Learn! Participate! Network! Enjoy! We hope to see you there!

IRRT and IRC Schedule at ALA Annual

FRIDAY, July 10
9:00 am - 1:00 pm  IRRT Pre-conference: “Digitization in Developing Countries”
$75 (includes light refreshments and lunch following)
Hyatt Regency Chicago – Columbus Hall C/D
1:30 pm – 3:30 pm  International Relations Committee I
Hyatt Regency McCormick - Conf. Center 12a-c
4:30 pm - 6:30 pm  International Librarians Orientation
McCormick Place West (MCP) - W-184d

SATURDAY, July 11
8:00 am - 9:00 am  IRRT Chairs Meeting
McCormick Place West - W-187
8:00 am - 10:00 am  IRRT Subcommittee Meetings
McCormick Place West (MCP) - W-187
9:00 am - 11:00 am  IFLA Subcommittee Meetings
McCormick Place West (MCP) - W-187
11:00 – 12:00pm  IFLA Update Meeting
McCormick Place West (MCP) - W-187
1:30 pm - 3:30 pm  IRRT International Papers: Libraries Serving Multicultural Communities
McCormick Place West - W-181

SUNDAY, July 12
8:00 am – 11:00 am  IRRT Executive Committee Meeting
McCormick Place West - W-175a
11:00 am - 12:30 pm  International Poster Session
McCormick Place Convention Center - Exhibits
1:30 pm - 3:30 pm  Libraries of Sub-Saharan Africa: Assessing Recent Successes and Challenges
Fairmont Hotel - Crystal Room

MONDAY, July 13
10:30 am - 12:00 pm  Yes We Can: Support International Sustainable Library Development
McCormick Place West (MCP) - W-181
1:30 pm - 3:30 pm  IRRT – 60th Anniversary Chair’s Program Africa’s Resources: Funding, Gathering, Digitizing and Providing Access to Cultural Heritage
McCormick Place West (MCP) - W 192c
6:00 pm - 8:00 pm  International Librarians’ Reception
Harold Washington Library Center, Chicago Public Library

More details can be found at... http://tinyurl.com/obxng6
Developing a New Masters Program in Library and Information Science in Armenia, Georgia and Uzbekistan

By Alan Hopkinson and Tigran Zargaryan

Six organizations from Armenia, Georgia and Uzbekistan – the International Scientific Education Center and the Fundamental Scientific Library of the National Academy of Sciences (Armenia), Ilia Chavchavadze State University and the Georgian Library Association (Georgia), and the Tashkent University of Information Technology and Tashkent Institute of Culture (Uzbekistan) – are developing remodeled higher education degrees in Librarianship and Archival Studies by adopting an appropriate European model. A consortium has been set up of five European Union universities (Middlesex and the Robert Gordon University, UK, Parma, Italy, Barcelona, Spain and the Rezekne Higher Education Institution, Latvia). The consortium has been awarded a three year grant from the European Union (EU) Tempus-Tacis program which supports the development of higher education in countries of the former Soviet Union. The curriculum will be based on accepted best practice in European Universities’ Library and Information Science (LIS) faculties and will comply with the requirements of the local ministries of education.

Librarianship as a career is not in demand among graduates in these countries, and those who do undertake currently available courses are not satisfied with the level of teaching and the knowledge obtained. Most graduates fail to get intellectual jobs. The level of awareness in European languages is very limited. Library administrators tend to prefer graduates in languages, history and sociology as being much more advanced in their intellectual development.

As a result, LIS work in these countries is making no significant progress. Another important problem facing the library communities is the absence of lifelong learning programs and advanced skills courses for librarians who require professional retraining. LIS education needs radical modernization, as the existing curricula are, in their form, content and teaching approaches, still based on 1960s practices: lectures are heavily overloaded with outdated Soviet library management thinking.

It is obvious that introducing new curricula totally oriented to the Western experience is the only solution to attracting talented and motivated students. We intend to use a variety of approaches and effective change management processes and these include:

1. Development of innovative pedagogy and a diverse range of instructional materials and facilitation methods to suit a variety of learning contexts and learning development needs.
2. Creation of human capacity and enhancement of skills sets to support the growing educational needs of the partner countries’ universities in terms of curriculum development, the adoption and engagement with innovative teaching and facilitation methods and the production of relevant teaching and learning resources, improving and maintaining standards of education and training.
3. Development of academic staff in assessment methods and practices.
4. Introduction of a quality assurance and enhancement system.

As far as Armenia is concerned, the authors firmly believe that “the next few years will be a busy time for the Armenian library community; libraries with the help of digital technologies must become active contributors to the management of change in Armenian society. This will help keep librarianship in the mainstream of progress” (Zargaryan, 2007). We are confident that this project will lead to an increased number of new programs being offered and will enhance the knowledge base of library and archive workers in Armenia, Georgia and Uzbekistan. And lastly, this multi-country project, via the library services which support teaching in all disciplines, will allow all academics (not just LIS educators) to develop high standards of teaching, learning and assessment skills; to take into account information tools in their curricula; and to introduce quality assurance practices that will lead towards building knowledge societies in the partner countries. You can track these activities at http://www.flib.sci.am/Tempus.

References

Mr. Hopkinson is the Technical Manager (Library Services) at Middlesex University in London.
Mr. Zargaryan is the Director of the Fundamental Scientific Library of the National Academy of Sciences of Armenia.

Are you part of an international partnership? Have you recently visited or hosted your partner? If you have - please share your experiences with us! Send a description of your partnership or visit to intl.leads.irrt@gmail.com.
**Librarianship Training in the Republic of Palau**

By Megan Beard

For most people outside of Micronesia, the Republic of Palau is one of those countries that you have to go to Google Maps to locate. But in this tiny island nation, exciting things are happening for the library community.

In fall 2005, Palau Community College formalized the Library and Information Services (LS) program. Offering both an associate’s degree and an applied associate’s degree, it is the first and the only certification program for librarians in the Micronesian region. The LS courses were designed to provide an overall introduction to library services, library terminology, and common library tasks to prepare students for work in the libraries of Palau and well as to continue on with their education.

Before the development of the LS program there were several libraries and library workers in Palau, but with no formal training, work was difficult and furthering the development of the libraries was nearly impossible. One of the LS program’s first graduates, Pioria Asito, often tells others that the LS program opened up her world. Before taking the courses she said she was limited and did not see the possibilities in the library, it was just rows and rows of dusty books and patrons with questions that she wasn’t always sure how to answer. But after taking the LS courses, Pioria says that she now has the tools she needs to really help her patrons and to do her job to the fullest. She says that she sees how the library is an important part of the community and understands how meaningful her work in the library really is.

As of May 2008, there are four graduates of the LS program. First is Pioria Asito, who has worked at PCC Library since early 2000, and continued after graduation as a library technician. She is currently enrolled in a distance bachelor’s degree program and plans to continue her education through at least the MLS. Pioria is an active participant in the national library association, Palau Association of Libraries (PAL), and was selected by PREL, Pacific Resources for Education and Learning, for the Pacific Leaders training.

Second is Sunshine Garcia. Before graduating from the LS program, Sunshine was also working at PCC. After graduation, the Ministry of Health contacted her about an exciting new position at the Belau National Hospital Library, where she now works as the only librarian. Though the LS program does not have a class for medical librarianship, Sunshine has used the basic skills from the program and taught herself new skills to work in the field and has become a valuable asset to the Belau National Hospital and the doctors and nurses who work there. Sunshine is currently working on a grant with PREL to develop a digital library of health information in Palau.

Third is Grace Salvador, who is currently working as a library assistant at PCC Library. Grace has worked at the library for nearly three years and is considering continuing on to work on a bachelor’s degree in information technology. Her most favorite aspect of library work is interacting with technology and helping people find information using online resources.

Fourth is Mary Arius, by far the youngest of the current LS graduates and full of excitement and energy that inspires her fellow librarians. Mary also worked at PCC library, but shortly after graduation she applied for a position at Palau Public Library, the only public library in Palau, and is now working as the head librarian. In the short time she has been at PPL Mary has implemented big changes. Before Mary took over, the library closed every day at 4:30 pm and was not open on the weekends, which meant that most working people could not make it to the library. Starting in January, Mary convinced the Ministry of Education, the entity responsible for the PPL, to let her keep the library open until 7 pm on Tuesdays and Thursdays. The response to the new hours has been very positive and has increased the library numbers significantly. During the new evening hours Mary is also offering special training sessions to teach the local community how to use the computers and how to access research databases. In addition, Mary wrote a wishlist grant and will be receiving 10 new computers for the library later this year.

Aside from the four LS graduates, there are several other students enrolled in the program, many of whom will graduate within the next few years. Most of these students are currently working in libraries throughout Palau, such as the Belau National Museum Library and several of the elementary schools.

All four of the graduates and several of the current LS students plan to continue their education to work on bachelor’s degrees and someday master’s degrees and maybe even go all the way to a Ph.D. There is currently work in progress with a university in the United States to develop a transfer agreement from the PCC LS associate’s degree to an LIS bachelor’s degree and hopefully someday there will be a need to develop a transfer agreement for the master’s degree as well.

If you would like to learn more about the PCC LS program or the libraries of Palau, please contact Megan Beard at mbeard@palaunet.com or visit the Palau Association of Libraries website at www.palaulibraries.weebly.com. Mesulang!

Ms. Beard is the Library and Information Services Instructor at Palau Community College.
A Library Conference in China after the Summer Olympic Games

By Sha Li Zhang

The 10th annual conference of the Library Society of China (LSC) was held on October 27–31, 2008 at the Chongqing Library in Chongqing City, China. It welcomed more than 800 librarians from all of the parts of China, with the theme “Library Services: Sharing Resources and Serving all Citizens.” Several international guests: Ms. Claudia Lux, IFLA President; Dr. Sha Li Zhang, Chinese American Librarians Association (CALA) President, and Mr. Michael Dowling, Director of the ALA International Relations Office, were also invited to offer congratulatory remarks at the opening ceremony and presentations at plenary sessions. For the first time, the annual conference was broadcasted in real time through internet.

Rebuilding the Libraries

Chongqing City is in a neighboring region with Sichuan Province, about 500 kilometers away from the epicenter of the massive 8.0 earthquake on May 12, 2008. Numerous libraries were damaged and destroyed in the earthquake affected areas. At the conference, Mr. Li Zhongyu, Director of the Sichuan Provincial Library, reiterated the plans of rebuilding libraries through the government’s support. An initial model plan of a new Beichuan Library was demonstrated at the conference. The old library, located in the epicenter, was totally destroyed by the massive disaster.

Several heroic stories were told at the plenary sessions. One of the speakers was Ms. Li Chun, the Library Director of the Beichuan Library. Sitting on a wheelchair before a microphone, Ms. Li described her inner struggle when she was buried under the rubble of the damaged library for 75 hours before being rescued. Ms. Li has gone through numerous surgeries. Warm greetings, cards, and gifts came to her from the librarians in the country and around the world. Ms. Lux, IFLA President, has even invited her to tell her story at the 2009 IFLA Annual Conference in Milan. On this side of the Pacific Ocean, CALA has raised funds in the U.S. and has sent the first group of donations of $10,000 to help the immediate family of the deceased library staff and to help with the medical needs for injured library workers such as Ms. Li. LSC in China has agreed to assist CALA in distributing the funds.

Library Declaration Announced

It was the first time in the history of the Chinese library community that a library declaration was officially announced at the conference. The Declaration, initiated and drafted by LSC, went through several revisions based on feedback and comments from the librarians in China. The declaration recognizes that the library is an open center for knowledge and information; provides equal services to all users; demonstrates humanity in its services and operations; offers quality, effective, and professional services; shares and develops information resources; promotes readings among all citizens, and collaborates with librarians and library associations (http://www.lsc.org.cn/). According to the LSC officials, this kind of public document will help libraries for advocacy efforts.

ALA Management Model Shared

Michael Dowling, Director of the ALA International Relations Office, was invited to speak on the roles of library associations. Dowling took the opportunity of introducing ALA and ALA 2010 Strategic Plan. It was obvious that the attendees were very eager to learn more about ALA’s advocacy role as an NGO and how it works through coalitions, alliance, and partnership with other organizations to influence national information policy.

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Sha Li Zhang (second from right), Claudia Lux, and Michael Dowling are joined by Ministry of Culture officials in China (photo by Sha Li Zhang).
Ethiopia’s Hero

Continued from Page 1

Programs for Ethiopia Reads are run by local Ethiopians, with a staff currently numbering 27. Staff are given on-going training in librarianship, publishing and design, project management and NGO management. These trained individuals then carry these skills into libraries, schools and their communities.

Yohannes has also been recognized by CNN as a “CNN Hero”, to celebrate ordinary citizens who have made a world of difference. Initially selected as one of thirty heroes out of a field of 4,000 nominees from 75 countries, he was among ten finalists to vie for the honor of CNN Hero of the Year. A summary of his story, as well as several interesting videos of the activities of Ethiopia Reads, can be found at http://www.cnn.com/SPECIALS/2008/cnn.heroes/archive/yohannes.gebregeorgis.html.

For more information on Yohannes and Ethiopia Reads, see: http://www.ethiopiareads.org.

Ms. Lee is Technical Services Librarian at Regis University, Denver, CO; she is also a Returned Peace Corps Volunteer (Ethiopia 1974-76).

Volunteer at ALA Annual

Volunteers are needed every year to help international guests at Annual. What better way to meet a librarian from another land than to be a mentor or help out at the International Visitor’s Center?

Be a mentor: The IRRT Orientation/Mentoring Committee seeks mentors to help out international colleagues during the ALA Annual Conference. If you are interested in being a mentor in Chicago, it’s not too late. Please fill out a form at http://www.ala.org/ala/aboutala/offices/iro/iro-activities/intlmentor.cfm or contact the International Relations Office at intl@ala.org

Staff the IVC: The International Visitors Center (IVC) Committee needs volunteers to staff the International Visitors Center, open Friday, July 10 through Monday, July 13. IVC Volunteers assist international visitors by answering questions and giving directions at the conference (don’t worry, we provide all the information you need to help the visitors!). In addition to information, the IVC offers international visitors computers for email/Internet and a place to meet with friends and relax. To volunteer, send an e-mail to intl@ala.org.

Library Leaders to Address IRC/ACRL at ALA Annual

The International Relations Committee (IRC) of the Association of college and Research Libraries (ACRL) has organized an historic session to be held on Saturday, July 11, 2009 from 10:30 AM to 12:00 Noon. The theme of the meeting is “Academic Librarians and International Librarianship”.

Five well known speakers will discuss the importance and need of cooperation among professionals and libraries in the fast changing world with limited resources and budgets for academic libraries and high inflation.

Professor Robert Wedgeworth, former president of IFLA(1991-1997) and University Librarian Emeritus, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign will speak on the topic of “IFLA and Academic Librarians”; Jay Jordan, President and CEO of OCLC will discuss “OCLC and International Librarianship”; Beverly Lynch, former President of ALA(1985-86) and professor at the Graduate School of Education and Information Studies, University of California-Los Angeles will speak about “ALA/ACRL and International Librarianship in the Twenty First Century”; and Winston Tabb, Dean of University Libraries and Museums of the Johns Hopkins University will speak on “The International Librarianship and its Impact on Research Libraries in the United States”. Claudia Lux, President of IFLA will be the chief guest at the meeting and she will present plaques to all speakers for their contributions to international librarianship.

Visit the website for more details: www.ala.org/irrt60thanniversary
China Conference

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With fast economic growth in China, many cities have built new or renovated old public libraries. The new Chongqing Library, opened in 2007, is one of five cultural facilities built in recent years. The attendees were hopeful that the government will gradually increase its attention to this kind of cultural infrastructures, facilities, and resources where a library plays an important role in supporting all citizens’ educational and lifelong learning needs.

Sha Li Zhang is President of the Chinese American Librarians Association (CALA), and Assistant Dean for Collections & Technical Services at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro Libraries.

Hawaiian Elementary School Helps Iraqi Library

Courtesy of Michael Dowling, Director of ALA’s International Relations Office (IRO):

A Hawaiian elementary school has raised close to $800 in 3 weeks to help the library in Kirkuk, Iraq. Melinda Mizuno of Kaumana Elementary notified the IRO of its successful penny drive during March-April 2009. According to a report from a local paper, the 241 students at the school started the fundraising after reading the book “The Librarian of Basra,” by Jeanette Winter. Inspired by the true story of Alia Muhammad Baker and her efforts to save 30,000 books before the Kirkuk library burned down in 2003, students decided to start a penny drive. A penny drive, in case you are not familiar with this term, gathers pennies as donations, so that is almost 8,000 pennies the students collected! The school is working through the IRO to use the money as it is most needed by the library.

Over 1 Million Books Collected for Ugandan Children

The nationwide “Schools for Schools” book drive has collected 1.2 million books. Sponsored by Better World Books, the socially conscious online bookseller, and media-based nonprofit Invisible Children, the results of their four-month-long nationwide student book drive to raise awareness among young people of the conflict in northern Uganda far exceeded its goal of 250,000 books. The three highest volume book-collecting student groups were awarded all-expenses-paid trips to northern Uganda.

The winning school in the competition is St. Xavier High School in Louisville, KY, which collected over 30,000 books. The second place and third place winners are Robert Bateman High School in Burlington, Ontario and La Costa Canyon High School in Carlsbad, CA, each of which collected over 29,000 books.

The campaign – a combined film tour and traveling book drive – ended January 31st after educating roughly 312,000 students and raising $1.2 million. Roughly 220 schools participated in the book drive, including over 30 colleges and universities.