Appalachian State University and la Biblioteca Th’uruchapitas: A Sister Library Success Story

By Elizabeth Cramer & John Boyd

In March of 2010, we visited our library’s sister library in Bolivia, la Biblioteca Th’uruchapitas. Our experience gave us a new perspective on the Sister Library program, convincing us that engaging in a Sister Library project will prove beneficial to any American university. In this time of economic insecurity and budget cuts, administrators may question the idea of partnering with a library outside of the United States. More than in the past, they need to assuage the doubts of others for time, funds, and skills devoted to working with an international library. They also need to identify and make public the benefits for their own institution from such an affiliation. In order to encourage administrators, librarians, and library science educators of the worth of the Sister Library program, we present a summary of the Appalachian State University and la Biblioteca Th’uruchapitas partnership; a mutually beneficial relationship in which both sides give and receive according to their resources, skills, and needs. The success of this particular program has been internationally recognized, having received the IBBY Asahi Reading Promotion Award in 2003.

The relationship began in 1998 when Gaby Vallejo, founder of la Biblioteca Th’uruchapitas, came to Appalachian State University to speak about her innovative children’s library program in Cochabamba, Bolivia. The program caught the ear and heart of ASU Library Science professor, Linda Veltze. A conversation began between the two women that evolved into a more substantial relationship when the two institutions, ASU and la Biblioteca, became Sister Libraries through the White House Millennial Commission in 2000. Although the White House Millennial Commission no longer exists, the Sister Library program continues through the efforts of the American Library Association’s International Relations Round Table.

In a country that has little money for books, La Biblioteca Th’uruchapitas is the only library in Bolivia that provides books to children. La Biblioteca is staffed solely by volunteers, headed by Gaby Vallejo and a group of dedicated educators who proudly bear the title “las mujeres peligrosas” (dangerous women) due to their progressive ideas about education. Visitors from the United States are accustomed to patrons visiting their local library, but La Biblioteca does most of its work by going out and visiting the patrons.

The library itself is housed in an attractive yet non-descript building in a residential area. No sign outside the building proclaims the existence of a library within. The library itself consists of only two rooms. The larger

Continued on page 3
Message from the Editor

In this issue, we hear from librarians who have participated in international exchanges as part of partnerships.

From Irene Gashurov comes the stories of librarians from the City University of New York system of higher education exchanging places with librarians from Shanghai University and Shanghai Normal University. Her report shows that university libraries can benefit from direct partnerships.

The term “sister” appears in two stories - one about libraries partnered through the ALA Sister Library program, and another about libraries partnered by virtue of being in towns partnered through the Sister Cities International organization.

Elizabeth Cramer and John Boyd report on the Sister Libraries partnership between the library of Appalachian State University in North Carolina and the “dangerous women” who run la Biblioteca Th’uruchapitas in Bolivia. This article demonstrates the tangible - and intangible - benefits a partnership can provide, especially over a long time.

The other “sister” article comes from Alana McGrattan, who visited Ashgabat, Turkmenistan, which is partnered with her city of Albuquerque, New Mexico. Her report on a fascinating visit is an example of how library partnerships can come from other partnership structures.

Given the current difficult economic situations faced by many countries, it is increasingly difficult to engage in international exchanges. However, there are many ways to maintain and develop relationships with colleagues around the world. The IRRT website offers several options, including the Free Links Program for library development wiki and, of course, the Sister Libraries wiki. With the ever-spreading presence of the Internet, becoming a partner with a library around the world is entirely feasible. And as these articles show, very desirable. I hope this issue will inspire many of you to consider a partnership! It is very rewarding, in so many ways.

I regret to note that there is not a Chair’s Message for this issue, but it will return for the December issue.

Also, start making plans now to attend ALA Midwinter meeting - nothing like sunny San Diego in January!

~ 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.
room serves as the reading room and contains tables, stackable chairs, and bookshelves. A second smaller room serves as an office with a desk, computer and more bookshelves. As we learned more about the many different programs operated by Gaby and her volunteers, it became clear that la Biblioteca reaches far beyond these two small rooms. The library is not a quaint children’s library but a network of active and invested volunteers reaching out to schools, non-profit organizations, neighboring public libraries, and the general public. Currently la Biblioteca has over 8,000 books available for the children in the Cochabamba area.

During our visit in March, Gaby took us to the public school La Escuela 27 de Mayo (the May 27th School), in the center of Cochabamba. The school itself is a large courtyard surrounded by two tiers of classrooms. Due to the insufficient number of public schools, three different four-hour school sessions are held each day in this building; morning, afternoon, and evening. Four teachers from this school participate in the Biblioteca Th’urachapitas project La Ronda. This project lends books to teachers who in turn lend them to students. Often every member of the family will read the book before it is returned to the teacher.

We also visited CAICC, Centro de Apoyo Integral Carcelario y Comunitario, where volunteer teachers from la Biblioteca Th’uruchapitas come to spend time helping students with their homework and special writing projects. Many of the students at CAICC have mothers incarcerated at the nearby women's prison. In Bolivia, children are allowed to live in the prisons with their incarcerated parents but are free to go to school and attend other activities during the day. At CAICC children spend their free time playing music, doing their homework, and earning some extra money by painting ceramics, baking bread, or performing music.

Additional programs created by la Biblioteca include two versions of the bookmobile: the Bibliobus, a van that travels throughout the town and surrounding area to bring books to children; and the Tren de la Lectura (Reading Train), a motorized train with engine and passenger car, equipped with books. The train gets quite a bit of attention driving through the streets, attracting kids to take a spin around town while reading books. Gaby Vallejo and other volunteers have also published numerous children’s books, scholarly research, and informational materials.

In the past year, ASU and la Biblioteca have worked together in numerous projects. La Biblioteca has hosted several groups of ASU students who traveled to Bolivia. These students were in Bolivia for a number of reasons: conducting research, working on international service projects, or taking a study-abroad class for credit. As more and more students seek out international service projects and study-abroad opportunities for our students, ASU faculty and students collecting books, raising funds, and promoting public awareness of the program. In summary, our status as Sister Libraries continues to be a source of pride, opportunity, and inspiration for both institutions.

Elizabeth Cramer and John Boyd are librarians at Appalachian State University.
From New Mexico to Turkmenistan:
Sister Libraries from Sister Cities

By Alana McGrattan

Turkmenistan is a country in Central Asia that is 80% desert and slightly larger than California. It became independent from USSR in 1991 and has been developing at fast pace mostly due to large deposits of oil and gas. It borders Iran, Afghanistan, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan and the Caspian Sea and has a population of almost 5 million. Turkmenistan maintains a policy of “positive neutrality” trying to balance all the powers in the region. It is a secular state although 89% of the population is Muslim.

Ashgabat, Turkmenistan and Albuquerque, New Mexico share some interesting geographical features, a love of horses and carpets, agriculture in the desert but even more amazing are the people who seem to have a special connection to one another. The two cities have been part of the Sister Cities International program since July of 1990 when Sally-Alice Thompson, an Albuquerque resident, met a like-minded Turkman, Murad Nazarov, on a peace march in Russia. They were successful in officially establishing a Sister Cities relationship between the two cities. Nazarov is presently the Ambassador to Iran. Since that initial contact, people from each of the two cities have been visiting back and forth, often staying with families and further deepening this connection.

I had the opportunity to make such a visit in October/November of 2009. Albuquerque Sister Cities were invited to attend the 18th Independence Day celebrations. Shortly before our departure we had hosted a delegation of Turkmen water engineers who visited New Mexico. This made our visit that much more exciting knowing that we would spend time with our new friends during our visit to Ashgabat. Host families were arranged for all of the Albuquerque delegates. I stayed with the Meredova family. Zohra Meredova is mother of nine children and is highly sought after as a translator throughout the country. I would see her return home after lengthy sessions of translation and still have the energy to supervise homework and read to her grandchildren. The amazing hospitality in Turkmenistan is almost unimaginable. The graciousness of the people, especially our hosts and their families, made our visit so memorable.

The Turkmenistani people are proud of their shining white city, the city of love, Ashgabat. Having undergone many renovations during the last decade by the former President Saparmarat Niazov, the city is startlingly beautiful with white marble buildings and spectacular fountains and gardens. The Albuquerque delegates were invited by President Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedow to the Independence Day parade in front of the Presidential Palace. We were taken to races at the Hippodrome featuring their world famous Akhal Tekke horses. Living on a ranch in New Mexico, this was a particular treat for me. Later I was able to actually ride one of their beautiful stallions.

We were also invited to a spectacular event in the Stadium featuring pageantry by young people from all the regions of the country. Most of the young people daily wear traditional dress that includes an embroidered cap, featuring a special design for girls and another design for boys. The event in the Stadium included the most beautiful costumes and dances. Turkmenistan is famous for textiles. At all of the events the 5 regions of the country were represented with their own cultural displays.

Since I also serve on the Eurasia and Central Asia sub-committee of ALA’s International Relations Committee, I expanded my visit to include the National Library of Turkmenistan and the Academy of Sciences Library.

Continued on page 6
International Leads
September 2010

Academic Library Exchange: Shanghai, China and New York City

By Irene Gashurov

Ellen Sexton, professor at John Jay College Library, enrolled in a Mandarin language class. Sexton is from Ireland and has studied European languages, but she was making slow progress. After an eight-week course she was just able to do little more than introduce herself and was resigned to communicating with her students solely in English. In the weeks before her departure she read Inspector Chen detective stories and checked emails from Liu Hua, deputy library director at Shanghai University, who assured Sexton that her sojourn in Shanghai would reap “a full harvest” and be a “complete success.”

On the other side of the globe, Pan Lan was getting ready for her exchange trip to Baruch College. Selected by the Shanghai Normal Library administrators for her fluency in English and her well-rounded education, Lan was instructed to bring back American know-how of library procedures. At once excited to experience American culture and a little anxious, Lan polished her conversational skills by watching reruns of “Desperate Housewives.”

After ten months of intense negotiations with two of Shanghai’s major public universities - Shanghai University and Shanghai Normal University - the City University of New York (CUNY) launched the Shanghai library exchange program this April. The program aims to facilitate “American and Chinese library collaboration” and promote “positive international relations between the United States and China.” Two other librarians, Subash Gandhi, associate librarian at Queens College, and Ming Lu, associate professor of information science at Shanghai University Library, will participate in the exchange at Shanghai Normal University and Queens College later this spring.

The impetus for the program came from visits by CUNY faculty to China, where vast changes in society have taken place as the country has widened access to the Internet, particularly in the areas of business and education. Although limits to the freedom of communication persist, China is now second only to the U.S. in the number of papers it publishes in science and engineering journals. And as the Chinese government increases pressures on its scientists to compete with the West, it has made a huge investment in the sciences. Chinese academic libraries are the beneficiaries. They have been building their collections and seeking out programs to facilitate exchange of expertise with the U.S., which is still considered the leader in library innovation. Shanghai University, meanwhile, has been conducting its own quiet diplomacy with CUNY for the last 30 years through a program of exchanges with CUNY faculty, though this did not include library faculty until just recently.

After one such faculty visit in 2008, CUNY librarian Zuwang Shen proposed an exchange program between CUNY and Shanghai University Library. Realizing the tremendous potential benefits of building professional contacts around the globe, University Librarian Curtis Kendrick enlisted Kenneth Schlesinger, chief librarian at Lehman College and a Fulbright fellow to Vietnam, to assist him with the design of an international library faculty exchange program. Together they secured initial funding from CUNY’s Center for International Service to launch a two-year program with Shanghai University.

At that time, Kachuen Gee, librarian at Lehman College, was traveling to a conference in Canton, China, and offered to discuss the plan with the library directors at Shanghai University. Soon Shanghai Normal University, the city’s top teacher’s college, heard about the exchange, and invited Gee to visit. The university’s director, Yu Kong, and deputy director Wu Zhirong, greeted Gee as an official emissary and seemed to consider the proposed exchange program a fait accompli. Gee, in turn, invited Wu to come to New York and discuss the program further with Kendrick. Director Wu arrived in New York with a Chinese-language contract. In his speech at the Library Association of the CUNY Institute on Library Leadership last October, Wu told the audience that librarianship in China has become a truly global profession, and that while Chinese academic libraries have achieved much in terms of technological innovations, they were now looking to the U.S. for leadership and direction.

Kendrick welcomed the opportunity. He said the two institutions shared many commonalities. Both were major public universities in two of the
Turkmenistan

Continued from Page 4

The National Library is located in a fantastic new complex called the Palace of Culture. We were greeted by the Director, Gozelece Mumametkulieva. She took us on a tour of the facility including a visit to a new computer lab installed with assistance from the United States. We spoke of ways we could partner and I brought information about our local libraries including Albuquerque Public, University of New Mexico, and Rio Grande Chapter of the Special Libraries Association. A preservation project was in process that included books from the 16th century. They were looking for some input on this program. Later I was introduced to the General Manager of the Palace of Culture Tuwakbibi Kurbanowna Durdycyva who also welcomed the idea of a Sister Libraries relationship.

I also visited the Academy of Sciences Library and met Almaz B. Yazberduev, Director of the Center for Sciences and Libraries. The Librarian, Movlamova Azzygul, showed us the records conversion project. At present there is no computer catalog and no computerized databases in the computer lab at either the National Library or the Academy of Sciences Library. They are in the process of converting their catalog records but have not yet selected a management system. Most of the titles and records were in Russian.

The libraries in Turkmenistan have not been fully developed. Under the former President they had been closed for a period of time. It is a great opportunity for us to share experience and expertise with professionals who are truly committed to enriching the lives and educational opportunities of their youth. Although Russian is the language of many adults, English has been declared the second language of the country. Most young people are learning English and were very enthusiastic to practice with us, as we were with them. Forty percent of the population is 14 or younger. We have invited librarians from Ashgabat to visit our libraries in Albuquerque and hope to make this happen in the immediate future.

Alana McGrattan is a retired librarian from New Mexico and currently serves on the Eurasia/Central Asia committee.

New Group in IRRT: International Sustainable Library Development

Are you interested in International Sustainable Library Development? Then you should know about the International Sustainable Interest Group of IRRT. The ISLD serves as a clearinghouse of sustainable community-based library projects in developing areas of the world. The group mobilizes the power of ALA librarians to raise awareness of and make significant contributions to international library development. Librarians in developing countries can tap into resources for training and projects in their libraries.

Visit the website to learn about...
• Recent events and upcoming meetings and programs
• Library Development projects
• Fundraising Tips
• International Library Development Materials

http://www.ala.org/ala/mgrps/rts/irrt/irrtcommittees/islisl.isld.cfm

All IRRT members are welcome to join! Contact Connie Champlin, cjchamp@mac.com, to join the ISLD mailing list.

Has your library been doing exciting things with an international twist? If so, please share your experiences with us! Send a report to intl.leads.irrt@gmail.com.

Photos are always welcome!
Shanghai

Continued from Page 5

Shanghai is the greatest cities in the world. Both were undertaking a major push to expand their science programs. “The U.S. and China have much to learn from each other,” he said. “Chinese libraries offer many technological advances that we’re eager to study and possibly adopt. But we believe that Chinese libraries, too, can benefit from exposure to American principles of access to information and perspectives on intellectual property standards.”

Details of the agreement, reached after lengthy discussions with CUNY attorneys, allowed the Shanghai university libraries and CUNY to exchange a total of eight library faculty, provide them with stipends, health insurance and the chance to examine and evaluate best practices. The CUNY Council of Chief Librarians agreed to grant leave to participating faculty and five campuses—Baruch, Lehman, Queens, Staten Island and York—offered to host the exchange scholars during the program. From the Chinese side, the new contract spelled out the particulars of the program in great detail, including not only their expectations of what CUNY librarians should teach, but also such fine-print requirements that Shanghai librarians be met at the airport and “escorted to prominent libraries and cultural attractions throughout New York City.”

Minor problems did indeed arise, but they were dealt with quickly. The first glitch involved Lan’s assignment to Baruch College. The only personal information Lan provided to CUNY in her dossier was her resume, and further attempts to reach her in China met with a “firewall.” With little to go on, the program organizers at CUNY were left to infer her interests from her CV. Based on the fact that she held an MBA, they assigned her to Baruch College, which has a business focus. Once in New York, however, Lan revealed to her host at Baruch, Chief Librarian Arthur Downing, that the real goal of her trip was in fact to study education library resources, not business ones. Downing scrambled to fix the situation, and lined up meetings with education faculty at Lehman College, Teachers College and Bank Street College. “We have to work out a better system of communication,” said Downing, but added that the rewards of the exchange far outweigh the occasional snafus. “This is an invaluable investment on the part of the university.” Indeed, if Lan’s lectures, with titles like “Research on the Information Commons” and “Obstacles to Building a Subject Portal” are any indication, Shanghai Normal Library is in the vanguard of information technology. The library is an information commons in the truest sense, because the number of electronic resources—digital collections, blogs, chat reference and document delivery—is transforming the way people study at Shanghai University. “Students in Shanghai don’t come to the library, they have virtual access,” says Lan.

In her first talk, “Introduction to Shanghai Normal University Library,” Lan demonstrated how the library has been working to harvest metadata—data about data—from a range of electronic sources to create a search engine that cuts across disparate databases as if the data existed on a single central platform. “What Shanghai Normal is trying to do with even a few databases, few libraries have done,” says Jin Ma, Baruch metadata and cataloging librarian.

In China, Sexton hopes to learn of similar technological advances from her new colleagues at Shanghai University Library, where the collection includes science databases that CUNY considers too costly for its own collections. “China appears to be approaching levels of development that we associate with the West,” she says. “In the U.S. there’s the belief that freedom of information is essential for innovation and economic strength, so Shanghai University is a real laboratory for testing that hypothesis.”

In her first weeks in Shanghai, Ellen Sexton has discovered that her young Chinese colleagues have openness to outsiders and don’t shy away from discussing controversial topics like transparency or the Google incident. Rather, they talk about these things mainly from the perspective of what can be done to get around the roadblocks. The departure of Google from the mainland, for instance, has driven Shanghai librarians to seek Chinese-language alternatives, and Sexton has learned to follow suit. When she discovered that she couldn’t access her lecture on YouTube, she posted reading materials for her library students on the popular Chinese-language hosting site QQ instead.

Another great benefit of cross-cultural exchange is, of course, having fun in a new place. Sexton enjoys leaving the campus to hunt for delicacies at the noodle makers’ mini restaurants or food court malls. When her fledgling language skills fail her, she resorts to pointing. “Due to a combined inability to communicate what I want and recognize what I see, my vegetarian principles have been put on hold,” she says. “Fortunately the dumplings taste excellent.”

Shanghai is “impossible to pin down,” says Sexton. It’s a city where modern high rises stand alongside temples and endless bicycle paths and abandoned gardeners’ water pumps line the street. She lives in a hotel for librarians on Shanghai’s verdant campus, which was all farmland just ten years ago. While it’s usually peaceful, the student radio station broadcasts music over the loudspeakers three times a day, reminding Sexton that she is in communist China. “The radio adds a surreal element to being here,” she says.

Meanwhile, back in New York, during the first week of Lan’s six-week stay, members of the LACUNY hospitality committee took the guest librarian on

Continued on page 8
Sri Lanka Library Association Celebrates 50 Years

The 50th birthday of the SLLA was celebrated on a grand scale on August 28, 2010 at the auditorium of the Industrial Technology Institute, Colombo, where the association was formed on August 28, 1960.

In his welcome remarks, the SLLA President traced the history of the association and its achievements over the past half century. Mr. Mahinda Rajapaksa, President of Sri Lanka, and Dr. Ellen Tise, President of IFLA, participated in a conference honoring the association. At the celebration party, United States Ambassador for Sri Lanka H.E. Ms. Patricia Butenis cut the elegant Birthday Cake together with Mr. Upali Amarasiri, President, SLLA. Details of the conference and celebration can be found at www.slla.org.lk.

Editor’s note - We send our congratulations and best wishes for another 50 years of success to our fellow librarians!

Shanghai

Continued from Page 7

a tour of Chinatown. It made Lan feel that she had never left home. After a dinner of steamed dumplings and beef, the exchange guest pronounced the cuisine delicious but “good for Americans” because it was too sweet for Chinese tastes. Asked about her first impressions of New York, Lan said that she cherishes the opportunity to be here. “Conditions in China are quite different. What I learn here will be helpful to our collection development strategy.” Then she paused. “It’s not easy for us to get visas.”

“She’s done very well,” says Schlesinger. “She was jet-lagged, and many people in her shoes would have found the situation intimidating.” He added that, while he wanted Pan Lan to have an American experience, it was also important for her to have someone here who understands Chinese culture, so he asked librarians Kachuen Gee and Jin Ma to be her big sisters in New York. “I think she’ll have an enriching experience,” he says. “I want her to return home not only to share her new expertise but also generate enthusiasm about CUNY.”

Time to start thinking about Midwinter... in beautiful San Diego!

sandiego
American Library Association
Midwinter Meeting & Exhibits
January 7-11, 2011