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Libros for Oregon: Collections Connect Communities A New LSTA Grant to Help More Oregon Libraries Take Advantage of the Guadalajara Book Fair

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Erratum

Added IMLS grant statement 8/4/17

Libros for Oregon: Collections Connect Communities

A New LSTA Grant to Help More Oregon Libraries Take Advantage of the Guadalajara Book Fair

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DEBORAH GITLITZ and her sister Abby Gitlitz at the Chengdu Research Base of Giant Panda Breeding in Chengdu, China.

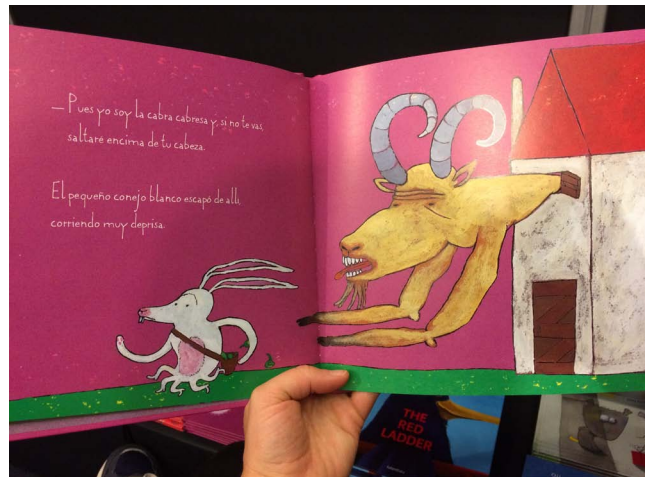
Deborah is the bilingual Outreach Librarian for Wilsonville Public Library. She received her MLS from Indiana University in 1995, began her library career as a Youth Services Librarian with Timberland Regional Library in SW Washington, and spent 15 years as a Bilingual Youth Librarian at Multnomah County Library (MCL), including two years running an LSTA-funded family literacy outreach program called Families Reading Together/Familias Leyendo Juntas. Deborah also works as a library consultant and literacy trainer. 2016 was her fourth visit to the Guadalajara book fair. During an earlier visit to the FIL for MCL she had the opportunity to make a presentation to the staff of 10 Guadalajara libraries on American-style early literacy library practices. They were thrown into giggles at the idea of reading to a room full of babies, and flat-out thought she was joking about Read to the Dogs.

Acquiring good books in Spanish for our libraries is a perennial challenge. We all want to enrich our collections with materials reflecting and honoring the experiences of people in our service populations, but this is often easier said than done. In the fall of 2015, a discussion arose on some Oregon library listservs (REFORMA and Libs-Or) about the challenge of connecting our patrons with culturally-appropriate, high-quality Spanish books. People lamented the comparative scarcity of satisfactory resources in the US and the difficulty of sending staff to the important Guadalajara book fair. Longtime Oregon library administrator and consultant Ruth Metz mentioned that she knew of libraries in California that had formed a loose book-buying collaborative to send representatives to the Guadalajara book fair. This caught my imagination. Why couldn't we do that in a way that would benefit all of Oregon? In the late fall, I gathered a team composed of interested parties from the listserv discussion, including members of OLA and REFORMA Oregon, and with the support of the Oregon State Library we raced to put together an LSTA grant proposal for review in early 2016. I'm very happy to report that we were awarded the grant. (Special thanks to Barratt Miller of Oregon City for her hard work on grant crafting!) In this article I'd like to explain the grant's goals and timeline, give a sense of the immense Guadalajara book fair, and encourage you to keep an eye out for the opportunity for your library to participate in this project beginning in the spring of 2018.





Grumpy Cat graphic novels.



Detail from *El pequeño conejo blanco* by Xosé Ballesteros Rey. <http://bit.ly/2p25fmu>



A busy weekend day (open to the public) at the FIL.

The project we put together is called “Libros for Oregon: Collections Connect Communities.” Its primary goal is to increase access to high-quality Spanish language books for the users of Oregon libraries, particularly users of smaller, rural libraries. Having received the grant, we have now embarked on our planning year (2016–17), to be followed by an implementation year (2017–18), and, I hope, an annual program that continues indefinitely.

Oregon libraries serve 500,000 Hispanic/Latino community members. Spanish is the second most-spoken language in Oregon, and plenty of those speakers read in Spanish, too. But finding high quality, culturally appropriate books in Spanish for our communities can prove to be a real task. It helps to have some selection and language expertise on staff, but even then, the biggest hurdle of all is still access.

Although an increasing number of Spanish and bilingual books are available through US-based publishers and distributors (*Library Journal*’s useful “Libro por Libro” column offers some recommendations, for example), it is still true that a vast number of books — especially books originally written in Spanish, books by Hispanic/Latino authors, and Spanish children’s books — are simply not available in the United States. So where





Entrance to the Expo Center.



Entrance to the Expo Center.



A state TV station interviews a knowledgeable comics vendor.

can we find a wide selection of diverse books appropriate for our Spanish-reading patrons? Guadalajara, Mexico!

The Guadalajara International Book Fair (la Feria Internacional del Libro, known as the FIL) had its 30th anniversary in 2016. With over 800,000 attendees annually (including over 20,000 “book professionals”), it is the largest Spanish-language book fair in the world, and it feels like it! In 2016 alone the FIL featured 2,042 publishing houses from 47 countries. Publisher’s stands can be as tiny as a tea shop or as vast as a warehouse, and they stretch for what feels like (and very nearly is) kilometers in every direction. Fabulous books for all ages (often from heartbreakingly short print runs), carefully shrink-wrapped to survive the onslaught of fair-goers, are arranged in elaborate geometric stacks two meters tall, like triumphal pillars and pyramids dotting the landscape. Authors give televised presentations. Publishers hold meet-and-greets. Book professionals from around the world converge in the vast International section and swap business cards. Librarians race around slapping sticky notes on coveted books and swap hot fair tips (*Pete the Cat* in Spanish at the Lata de Sal booth! Hot new adult romances! Books that approximate Easy Readers!) There are blocks and blocks of academic presses,





Mariachis perform at a publisher happy hour.

Mexican national presses, novelty book-sellers, publishers of youth materials, manga and comics, a whole transplanted used bookstore, and an entire wing for the headquarters of international publishers. There is color and activity everywhere, and the celebratory strains of mariachi music can regularly be heard, dazzling a private publisher party or leading a parade

throughout the byways to bestow prestigious prizes for best booths of the year. If Powell's is a City of Books, then the FIL is an entire principality of them.

There are already structures, scholarships and partnerships in place to help book-buying professionals participate in the Guadalajara FIL. The ALA/FIL Free Pass Program provides admission to the fair, three nights (six if you share a room) at a nearby business hotel, continental breakfasts, and \$100 toward the cost of airfare. Attendees must pay for the rest of the airfare, ground transportation, meals, and other costs. Some individual Oregon libraries and many large library systems already send a staffer or two to the FIL, but most libraries around the state, regardless of whether their staff has the language, culture and selection skills, can't easily swing the staff time and other resources to participate.

Our two-year LSTA project, Libros for Oregon, seeks to establish an affordable, realistic opportunity open to all public libraries (and possibly other kinds of libraries) statewide to access the resources of the FIL. The overarching goal is for Spanish-speaking Oregonians statewide — especially in rural areas — to have improved access to high quality, culturally relevant collections. We envision the project with three parts:

(1) Create the structure for an Oregon library book-buying cooperative, involving new participants each year, to purchase materials for participating members at the Guadalajara FIL.

- In early 2017, I'll be meeting with the project's volunteer Advisory Council to begin hashing out the logistical particulars, from the application and priority processes to the outreach requirements, documents for purchasing and accounting, and the specifics of project evaluation. The libraries of Washington County [WCCLS] were able to share some initial logistical advice; for three years, they have sent library staff to the FIL to buy materials on behalf of several libraries. We will also create a basic website to post project information, pertinent resources and reports.



- The Library Network of Clackamas County (LINCC), whose libraries serve many Spanish speakers, stepped up as the grant's fiscal agent to help launch Libros for Oregon in its initial phases. The project itself is open to participants statewide. In preparing the grant application we consulted with OLA. They are excited about the project and it is our mutual hope that OLA will be able to take on the project's administration once the two-year grant ends.

(2) Help participating libraries develop and implement outreach plans for connecting their enhanced collections with their Hispanic/Latino communities.


- It isn't sufficient to improve the relevance of the collection if that collection doesn't reach its users. Outreach is a crucial tool to connect Hispanic/Latino Oregonians with library collections, and the project will provide support to participating library staff, regardless of Spanish/Latino linguistic and cultural competency, in the form of outreach plan templates, online trainings, and guidance from OLA's Outreach Roundtable.

(3) Create an annual "Best of FIL" booklist, annotated to show US availability, for all Oregon libraries to use in collection development.

- My ambition here is to work with a library student each year who will compile booklists based on the purchases of participating libraries (plus, perhaps, lists from other Oregon libraries who attended the FIL) and post them on our eventual website. Ideally the student will also research the lists and make annotations indicating which titles are available to all through traditional US avenues.

How can your library find out more about the Libros for Oregon project?

- I gave presentations on Libros for Oregon at OLA this April 2017. Presentation slides may be viewed on NW Central here, <http://tinyurl.com/nxnnnw3> (under REFORMA's preconference workshop [entitled "The Latino/a Community and Your Library,"] and under "Libros for Oregon") and on the REFORMA Oregon website here <http://reformaoregon.weebly.com/blog/ola-pre-conference-workshop-2017>.
- Look for a Libros for Oregon session, with updated information on the project, at OLA in April 2018.
- When the project plans are more fully developed and the website is ready, I will post updates on the Oregon library listservs.

In the meantime, you are welcome to contact me with any questions. I am excited about this experiment to help more of Oregon's libraries access the treasures of the FIL! 

Resources

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