Kimberly Johnson shares her knowledge and love of African-American history
with Tulsa City-County Library customers

During her adolescent and teen-age years growing up in the Bronx, Kimberly Johnson didn't learn much about African-American history. A 34-year-old African-American, Johnson said it wasn't because she lacked interest in the subject, but because black history wasn't an integral part of elementary and secondary schools' curriculum while she was going to school.

Life and perceptions changed for Johnson when she moved to Oklahoma and entered the University of Tulsa (TU) in the early 1990s. Taking several courses on African-American studies, Johnson got a wide awakening – much to her surprise and delight – when she learned of the many accomplishments and contributions of African-Americans.

Like a sponge, Johnson absorbed everything she read about and by African-Americans, as she constantly craved to learn more.

"I couldn't get enough. I was so inspired and uplifted by the true history of my people," said Johnson, who graduated from TU with a double major in English literature and secondary education. "I strongly believe that if you set out to learn the good about people you normally will find it. And I did just that."

As the coordinator for Tulsa City-County Library's African-American Resource Center, Johnson gets to satisfy her hunger for knowledge, and use her education and literature majors to teach and share the best about African-Americans as a people.

Since the center's opening in June 1998 at the Rudisill North Regional Library, librarians have seen a 23 percent increase in the number of children and families attending new library programs and a 12 percent increase in library books and materials checked out.

The community served by the Rudisill library is predominately African-American; 31 percent of the families in the community live below the poverty level. Before the opening of the center and revitalization of the library, Rudisill had the lowest rate of library usage in Tulsa County – only three out of 10 people in this north Tulsa neighborhood used the Rudisill library, which was 50 percent below the state average. A survey of this neighborhood showed that the community would come to the library if it offered information on their African-American heritage.

"By enticing children and adults from the community to come to the library to check out their African-American heritage, we expose them to all the benefits of using the library and all the free resources available at the library, such as computer and Internet training, literacy classes, story times, and art and education workshops," said Johnson. "By exposing the community to their rich heritage, we give them a sense of pride and purpose."

When Johnson first heard that TCCL was creating an African-American Resource Center, she knew instinctively that it was where she belonged.

"I'm passionate about teaching and being a student of life," she said. "Literature is my all-time favorite study. I remember the first chapter book I ever read. It was 'Mary Poppins.' I can see it as clear as day. A library seemed like a natural place for me to end up."

Cont. on p. 15

Kimberly Johnson teaches about African American history with a hard-hitting display.
"The Library Stories"

Several librarians and trustees from the state of Oklahoma recently ventured to Washington D.C. for National Library Legislative Day. One of the recurring themes for the event was to tell your library’s stories. I think that is one of the most important things that libraries can do. We need to learn not to tell our customers, city officials, legislators and community leaders about how many books we check out or how many computers or books we have, but to tell these people what a difference libraries are making in the lives of our customers and our community.

One of the stories we shared in Washington was the joy a researcher found when searching for genealogical resources and finding a story that was vital to exploration of the family roots. A long time patron of the Oklahoma City libraries recounted how as a child, he visited the library 5,6,7 times a week and then later raised his own children in the library. Today they are all successful at what they do; and the library helped to make that happen.” At the recent Oklahoma Library Association conference, Dr. George Henderson told stories about what the public library had meant to him growing up poor in a Chicago ghetto. He believes the public library and aided him to achieve the success he enjoys today.

A recent visit to one of the small libraries in Oklahoma City, which serves an ethnically diverse, low economic area showed children rushing to the library to work on the Gates computers. These children do not have computers at home but the excitement and delight on their faces as they explore the Magic School Bus or Barney’s adventures via multimedia experience in the library are a joy to behold. They have embraced the computers and the library as “their special place.” These are the real stories of libraries and how they can make a difference in the lives of our citizens and our community. Gather those stories and pass them on to the leaders of your communities. Show them that stories are unfolding in your library every day and libraries are truly making a difference!

---Donna Morris

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President’s Column

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Calendar of Events

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A new member is excited about OLA!

This is my first year as a member of OLA, and I’m looking forward to what lies ahead. Last year, I began to seriously consider becoming a librarian. I decided that joining OLA would be a good place for me to start. It would give me an opportunity to meet and interact with “real” librarians, explore the different applications of librarianship, attend interesting workshops and meetings, as well as have some fun!

Why am I considering being a librarian? Well, after working at the Edmond Public Library for almost two years, I began to realize that I was enjoying myself. I love everything about libraries, from the smell of books to the buzzing of people meandering through the stacks. Not only do I find the general atmosphere of libraries pleasurable, but I love helping people gain access to the information they need. It was only after my father pointed out to me how suited I was for this profession that I began to see for myself how true it actually was. During my senior year in high school, I was very frustrated because I couldn’t decide on any one college major or career choice. I was being pulled in many different directions. I realized that library science is something that encompassed all of my interests, while still allowing me to have a specialty.

I participated in my first OLA activity last year. In October 1999, the Social Responsibilities Roundtable met at Orlando High School to help the librarian catalog the many books that were donated to the Mulhall Elementary School Library after the May 3rd tornadoes. Orlando High School is currently sharing its space with Mulhall Elementary School until it is rebuilt. We catalogued and made labels for many books using both original and copy cataloguing. I found the Winnebago program to be a little tedious and repetitive, but it got the job done. There was also a group of volunteers there from OSU-OKC who helped a great deal by sorting books and putting the labels we made on them. I was overwhelmed to see the amount of brand-new books that people had so generously donated. There were boxes stacked everywhere. I found the experience to be fun as well as informative. I met several librarians, from many different areas (both geographically and professionally). In addition, I was able to get some hands-on cataloguing experience!

I’m looking forward to the coming year’s events. I hope to attend workshops, meet new people, and learn more about this profession.

—Olivia Sammons

Kimberly Johnson (cont. from p. 1)

This literary enthusiast started her own book discussion club, called D.A.B.B. (Discussions About Black Books), in 1994 "before book clubs were popular." The club meets monthly to discuss the latest books by African-American writers. Club members rely on Johnson to make the selections.

Johnson’s zest for books and life carry over to her job; she has accomplished many goals during her year-and-a-half stint as coordinator of the resource center.

She established an internship program with TU where students who are enrolled in the university’s African-American Certificate Program earn three hours credit toward their degree for working at the center eight hours per week for one semester. The internship program gives students the opportunity to use and expand their knowledge of African-American culture by providing hands-on training, and gives Johnson a much-needed helping hand.

By creating the African-American Resource Center Web page at www.tulsalibrary.org/aarc, Johnson has given library customers all over Tulsa County, as well as the state, a taste of what the center has to offer.

"I am really excited about our Web page because one of the center’s primary goals is to offer a systemwide resource, not just a service for north Tulsans," said Johnson. "By providing a sampling of what the center has, the Web page whets the appetite of the library’s online customers and encourages them to come in and see what else we have to offer. Our online quizzes on African-American history are a big hit with area teachers."

The center’s exhibits are also making a big showing in the community. "Distorted Images," "Harlem Renaissance," "Aristocrats of Color" and "400 Years Without a Comb" are recent exhibits displayed at the center. Library customers who missed them at the library can view them on the Web page.

"The exhibits bring life to the resource center," said Johnson. "Through the exhibits, we involve people in the community who otherwise wouldn’t have a place or forum to showcase their historical items."

Her successes are many, but Johnson still isn’t satisfied. She wants the center to bridge the races—to link African-Americans to Hispanic Americans, Hispanic Americans to Asian Americans, Asian Americans to German Americans, and so on. She also wants Oklahomans to view the center as our state’s premier authority on African-American history.

With the same ambition and drive that carried her across the finish line of the 9.3-mile Tulsa Run last year after only four months of training, Johnson plans to lead the resource center into the 21st century with the support of the library system. And, if she succeeds with her goals, all children in our state will grow up learning the true history of African-Americans, and everyone will view and embrace African-American history as part of America’s history.

—Jackie Hill
Edmond Public Library staff discover “true grit” through challenging move and increased circulation

Some organizations pay consulting firms large sums to guide their staff through ropes courses. These team-building and leadership experiences serve to build trust among co-workers and form bonds that transcend and re-energize the common workaday experience. For those currently considering such an expenditure, I have a recommendation: plan a major expansion or renovation of your library, ask your staff to move the library, and save on those consultants’ fees! You’ll doubly benefit from the renewed sense of cooperation among the staff and from the manual labor they perform for the library.

Penn McCaleb, Chair of the Metropolitan Library System’s Commission, Mayor of Edmond Bob Rudkin, Jack Wheny, Library Commissioner representing Edmond, and Donna Morris at Edmond Library’s grand opening.

The Edmond Public Library, a branch of the Metropolitan Library System, opened the doors of its newly expanded building on June 5th, with a grand opening celebration on June 15th. 10,000 square feet were added to create a 27,000 square foot facility featuring a beautiful round room for youth programs, expanded meeting room space, a quiet reading room, added work space for staff, separate adult and children’s areas, beautiful colors throughout the library, and a teen area with funky retro-chairs and a lava lamp. The $2.5 million dollar renovation was part of a $13 million dollar capital improvements package funded by a ¾ cent sales tax approved by the citizens of Edmond.

Many facets of my co-workers’ personalities that I’d never glimpsed before came into sharp relief during the three-week move. I never would have guessed that Linda Gens, mild-mannered children’s librarian, could unload stacks of books onto temporary shelves at such a superhuman rate that I knew her to be possessed of Nabu, the Babylonian god of literature who must have been frantic to grant the people of Edmond access to his wisdom once again.

Our maintenance department worked daily miracles, heading up the move with a full crew and excellent help from inmates of a local women’s prison. MLS Deputy Director Donna Morris, handled countless details of the building project and the FF&E. The public relations department worked wonders with signage, coordinating media interviews, and masterminding the grand opening party. The automation department installed and upgraded many new computers. Technical processing held piles of new books back until we were able to deal with them. All the branches held many boxes of reserves waiting for Edmond customers. The business office processed stacks of paperwork for new furniture and equipment. Volunteer services developed a docent program to conduct library tours, provided beautiful flowers, and fashioned a gorgeous ribbon for the ribbon-cutting ceremony that made the library look like a brand new gift all wrapped up and waiting to be opened.

Circulation skyrocketed when we opened! On June 5th, circulation topped out at over 6,000 check-outs, which is more than twice what a busy Saturday used to be. We hit 6,000 again on June 19th, which someone pointed out to me was the due date for everything checked out on June 5th. Other days of the week have produced statistics averaging around 3,000. The first week we were open, we circulated over 24,000 items total.

A whopping 1,200 items were checked out on the first day by customers on our new “express check-out” stations developed by Metropolitan’s very own innovative Automation department. Extremely user-friendly, this touch screen system is being piloted at Edmond for use by the other branches. It’s fun to watch young children check their own
materials out; and senior citizens seem not at all daunted by the machines.

It's a good problem for a library to have—to be too busy. There's a mixed blessing of staff morale as the workload alternately exhilarates and exhausts us. People around the system have been helping out, volunteers are shelving, and our own staff has worked overtime just to keep up. We are currently hiring for several new positions, and circulation will probably level off soon. Hopefully, new staff won't be frightened away by our volume of business. One of my new interview questions is not just, "how do you feel about working with people," but "how do you feel about working with large crowds of people?"

Just as challenges faced by a group of people climbing a mountain can bring them closer together, just as the people of a war-torn country may feel a sense of unity, so might library staff feel more deeply bonded during a major library relocation or renovation. Of course, high stress can bring out our less noble qualities or even our worst character defects. But when there is a deadline for reopening, and a mission of continued good library service as a shared common goal, then teamwork becomes a priority. I am grateful that I was able to work with my colleagues in these extreme circumstances—my experience of them is certainly richer for this shared adventure.

—Karen Bays

OLA Executive Board Actions

January 21, 2000
Brookside Library, Tulsa City-County Library System
- Approved the Library Education Division workshop: "Don't Look Now: I'm Virtual—Effective Web Teaching Strategies"
- Approved the Government Documents Roundtable workshop about American FactFinder and Census information
- Approved entertainment choice and fee for Thursday night Conference entertainment

February 18, 2000
The Village Library, Metropolitan Library System
- Approved the printing of 2nd day issue envelopes honoring the Library of Congress and Oklahoma libraries
- Approved the renaming of two roundtables: Automation Roundtable will be called Technical and Electronic Services Roundtable, and Children and Young Peoples Roundtable will become Children and Teens Roundtable
- Approved the report from the Awards Committee during an Executive Session

If you forgot to buy the Library of Congress Second Day Issue Stamps offered at the OLA conference, you're still in luck! Extra Second Day Stamp Covers for sale at $2 per cover. E-mail John Phillips at: bart@okstate.edu or mail your request to him at: Documents Department, Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, OK 74078.
Librarians from across the state gathered on the OU Norman campus to see Pat Woodrum, retired Executive Director of the Tulsa City-County Library, receive the University of Oklahoma College of Arts and Sciences 2000 Distinguished Alumni Award and to hear her speak about the importance of politics in the library.

Woodrum addressed a special welcome to OUSLIS students. She said, "you are selecting one of the very best professions you could possibly go into—if I had it to do all over again, I would do it exactly the same."

Woodrum introduced the topic of her speech, "It is important to build networks, constituencies, and cooperatives. You must recognize the importance of building strong support systems. Allie Beth Martin, former TCCL Director, believed that libraries should be representative of the community served. Strong libraries should reflect all of the constituencies in their communities," she continued.

Woodrum broached the question, "why do some libraries seem more safe, secure, and on solid ground, while other institutions must struggle for support?" She cited two essential strengths common to successful libraries:

- A skilled, knowledgeable, service-oriented staff.
- The presence of strong support groups that receive constant care and feeding.

Types of groups in any community that can be cultivated for potential support include:

1. natural library supporters such as library users, Friends, board, volunteers, and library staff.
2. religious groups.
3. local businesses.
4. civic groups.
5. local government.
6. educational groups.
7. contributors and benefactors.

Woodrum emphasized the importance of staying aware of new community leaders and actively pursuing a relationship with them. When a new police chief or school superintendent came on the scene, Woodrum would drop them a note welcoming them to Tulsa with the message that she would be calling soon to set up an appointment for lunch. "Contacts like this are important," Woodrum explained, "because these new leaders will have no idea who you are, but it is your responsibility to make sure they get to know you."

"Involve as many community groups as possible in library programs to solicit their support, and tell staff to spread the word about the library when attending community meetings," Woodrum urged.

"TCCL served as the first academic library for developing colleges in the area. This created a good foundation for a continuing relationship with local colleges and universities," she continued. To meet the needs of the local business community, TCCL developed an outstanding collection in geology and petroleum. We invited 7 CEOs to breakfast, and asked them for a contribution to the TCCL Trust. Some of the CEOs hadn't been in the library since they were a student or since they had brought their young children to the library. This breakfast raised $10,000 which developed into $10.3 million. We had to add extra staff to manage this Trust," she said.

"When many of us entered the profession, it never crossed our minds that we were entering a career where we have to be politically active," Woodrum stated. "Neutrality was always emphasized back then. But political activism in support of libraries is crucial these days," she continued. She cited the example of OLA's hiring a professional lobbyist, and said that it is important for librarians to learn how to be volunteer lobbyists in support of libraries.

Woodrum recalled that when TCCL has faced censorship threats, they have drawn on these already-established relationships. In one instance they called upon respected community leaders including a senior member of the First Baptist Church, a Sex Therapist, a Sex Education Teacher from the public schools to serve on an advisory board.

The 1980s brought an increased problem with the homeless population visiting the library. Most seats in the central library were occupied by homeless people. Staff called representatives from law enforcement, community service agencies, churches, and the Tulsa city council to form a task force to study the problem. The result of this dialogue was the establishment of a Day Center for the Homeless, which serves 300-400 people daily. This is a place where they can get in out of the cold, clean up, and rest.

In a crisis affecting libraries as well as pleas for library support, communities are more likely to listen to community leaders than library staff, so established relationships with various groups in your community is crucial. In 30 years, TCCL never lost a bond issue or support base increase, Woodrum said.

Patrons benefactors, contributors, can be a mixed blessing. One library benefactor told Pat Woodrum that she was "overly vertically endowed," when she complained about the height of a doorway in a newly planned building under construction. Sometimes your greatest monetary supporters will want more control over the finished product than they should have, as in the case of a building project, she explained. In forming support groups for the library, Woodrum offered these hints:

- Support for the library requires continual care. It should be carefully planted and nourished like a garden (editor's note: Woodrum is also a master-gardener who chaired the steering committee for botanical gardens in Tulsa)
- Use the power of politics.
- Public support should reflect diversity of the community (when you recruit people for a task force, be sure that all segments of the community are well-represented.)
- Be ever-watchful, and make sure that power is not seized by one individual.
- It's helpful to form an advisory group any time you add a service.
- Develop key programming to highlight the collection.
- Nurture your Friends group, Trust Board, and Library Board— all will come together in support if there's a problem.
People, Places, and Happenings

Duncan Public Library is now listed in the National Register of Historic Places, according to the Preservation Oklahoma Newsletter. The Library, built in 1939 with funds and labor supplied by the WPA, is an excellent example of the Colonial Revival style. The building is atypical for WPA projects in the area in its use of buff brick. More frequently, the WPA utilized native stone in a rustic style. The building served the town until a new, larger library replaced it in the 1970’s. It now houses the Stephens County Genealogical Society.

Event: MPLA/NLA/NEMA 2000 Triconference, held in conjunction with the White House Conference on Library and Information (Mountain Plains Library Assn., Nebraska Library Assn., and Nebraska Educational Media Assn.)
Date: October 25-28, 2000
Place: Omaha, NE
Theme: Beyond the Horizon...Charting Our Course to the Future
Web Site: http://reinert.creighton.edu/triconf/

OLA SCHOLARSHIP RECIPIENTS
Jenny Stenis is the recipient of a $500 OLA Scholarship. An active member of OLA for the past eight years, she served on the Young Adult Sequoyah Book Committee for three years and the last three years she has served on the Sequoyah Administrative Team. Jenny has been a Children’s Services Assistant in the Pioneer Library System for eleven years. Attendance at Encyclo-Media and OLA conferences has given her an awareness of current trends in libraries and the library profession. She stated "by pursuing further education in library and information services, I feel I will become more proficient in the services I provide and more knowledgeable about the profession as a whole."

Karen Antell is the recipient of a $300 OLA scholarship. Karen is a Children’s Library Services Assistant in the Pioneer Library System. Prior to her this position, she was a free-lance editor, science and technical writer, and managing editor of a multidisciplinary academic journal. She has also volunteered in an elementary school computer lab and with the RIF (Reading is Fundamental) program. Achieving her MLIS will help Karen "pursue a career that I simply love...library work uses all my talents, and it has introduced me to one important characteristic that I never really knew I had: I truly like people and enjoy helping them."

The University of Oklahoma School of Library and Information Studies has announced the appointment of a new Director. Dr. Danny Wallace, who received his Ph.D. from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, will begin work on July 1. His wife, Dr. Connie Van Fleet, will join the OUSLIS faculty as an associate Professor on August 6. Congratulations and best wishes to you both!

Do you have customers who need to know about special library services? The Oklahoma Library for the Blind and Physically Handicapped has a statewide toll-free number: 1-800-523-0288. Oklahoma City area residents should continue to use 521-3514.

Sculptor of Edmond Public Library’s unique statue describes the development of “The Reader”

Editor’s note: After many questions from staff from other libraries as well as the public, I asked the sculptor of the statue at Edmond Library, Mary Lou Gresham, to write how this work of art came to be.

As a child, I was always “the artist” of my class. In 1970 I took my first ceramics class at University of Central Oklahoma. In 1981, I began showing my work in the Canterbury Art Festival in Edmond. In 1994 David Bickham, Chair of the Edmond Parks Foundation, saw a small version of “The Reader” at a festival, and asked me if I could do that life-size in bronze. Although I had not yet done a bronze, I said “certainly!” And that’s how I got the commission to do “The Reader.”

I asked Charles Boldin, long-time director of Boy’s Ranch Town, to pose for me. He consented, and I took several photos of him which I referred to as I sculpted. I was not trying to do a sculpture of Mr. Boldin himself, but when I finished his head, it was uncannily like him. However, I decided it was a shade too large and when I whittled it down, I did not try to keep the likeness. That is why “The Reader” looks a little like Mr. Boldin but not quite.

I located a foundry south of Fort Worth, Texas, run by Harry Geffert. He advised me to start with big chunks of Styrofoam. After the Styrofoam was blocked out, I applied a thin layer of oil-based clay. For the newspaper, I used actual newspaper sheets stiffened with wallpaper paste. The Edmond Sun helped me select the edition to use and gave me copies of the required pages. I etched through the wax to represent the print and photos of the paper.

As I worked, my husband or my father would pose for me. The hat belonged to Mr. Boldin’s brother; the briefcase and shoes were my father’s and the hands were my mother’s. But the overall feeling comes from my memories of my grandfather, Max L. Olsen. He was a gentleman without parallel and never went anywhere without his hat. I can still picture him reading the paper. To me he represented all the “gentlemen” of his era.

After I finished the sculpture, the foundry made the mold. They made a wax copy from the mold, at which time I worked more on details. They cut the work into sections, and coated the pieces with clay slurry 13 times. Once thoroughly dried, they poured molten bronze into the sections. The wax melts out, leaving bronze in its place. The newspaper was “slow burned,” a process many foundries don’t do. Finally all the pieces were welded together and burnished. The mold and the original sculpture were destroyed.

-Mary Lou Gresham
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