

JOSEPH F. SHUBERT LIBRARY EXCELLENCE AWARD APPLICATION

Please check one category only: **Individual Library_X_**
Library Consortium (System)_____



NAME OF LIBRARY OR LIBRARY CONSORTIUM (SYSTEM)

Red Hook Public Library

PARENT INSTITUTION: _____

ADDRESS: 7444 S. Broadway, Red Hook, NY 12571

CONTACT NAME: Erica Freudenberger _____

PHONE NUMBER: (845) 758-3241 _____

SIGNATURE:  _____
CHIEF LIBRARIAN/DIRECTOR

For Consortia applications:

SIGNATURE: _____
CHIEF OFFICER

SIGNATURE: _____
CHIEF OFFICER

Your nomination for a project/achievement that occurred within the last 2 years should include your responses to the following 4 questions:

1. a) Briefly describe your library or library consortium (system) and its community. Provide information about size, budget, type, users. b) Briefly describe your project/achievement.
2. How did you identify the user need(s) for your project?
3. What did your library or library consortium (system) do to respond to that (those) need(s)? What challenges were met?
4. What impact did this project have on your users and/or your community? Supply quantifiable data if appropriate.

Please limit your narrative to no more than 4 pages. Please send your form, along with any attachments, electronically to Paula.Paolucci@nysed.gov.

BACKGROUND

Located in the heart of the village of Red Hook in a mid-nineteenth century octagonal building, Red Hook Public Library (RHPL) has been serving its community since June 15, 1898. Chartered to serve the Village of Red Hook (population 1,961), the library actually serves the entire Town of Red Hook (population 11,319) as well as the Town of Milan (population 2,370), which is unserved by any library. RHPL, a municipal library, has more than 4,500 active cardholders, a budget of \$324,990 per year funded through Chapter 414 and Chapter 259 budget referendums, and more than 200,000 annual visits – a significant achievement for a 4,867 square foot building celebrating its 150th birthday this year!

The past five years have been a time of tremendous growth and change for the library. Becoming director in August 2010 was intimidating. The library had a reputation for being an unfriendly place, best to be avoided – particularly for anyone who had a child under 18 years of age. A building/renovation project had just begun, making the library ADA-accessible and creating a Children’s Library. The building project was being financed out of the library’s operating budget – at that time, \$165,000 per year. If the library were to thrive, it would require rethinking about what it was doing and how it was doing it. At the same time, the Red Hook community was reeling from the economic recession; shops on Main and Market streets were shuttered, the few that were left were struggling to survive.

As the library began to build momentum, a strategic plan was developed complete with a new vision and mission statement to more accurately reflect the direction the library planned to take. RHPL undertook a communication audit, and made changes into what and how news of the organization was being shared. Library staff revamped our Web site (www.redhooklibrary.org), began issuing a monthly e-newsletter and began an ambitious series of programs. Since 2010, visits to the library have increased by 516%; attendance at programs has increased 140% and circulation has increased 23%. **In response, the community has voted to increase the library’s budget by 97%, from \$165,000 to \$324,990.**

PARTNERSHIPS

Believing that a small library can only be as strong as the community it serves, RHPL has become an integral part of the town’s socio-ecosystem by working in collaboration with other community agencies such as: Red Hook Together, Bard College, town and village governments, Chamber of Commerce, police, school district, non-profits, and art organizations. These relationships have allowed RHPL access to people, services, and information it would not have had otherwise, creating a more vibrant library and community.

The following are a list of examples of just some of the partnerships the library has created:

- Partnered with the **Chamber of Commerce** and a local bank to create “Ladies Who Launch,” an ongoing series of programs geared toward women in career transition. Bi-

monthly programs focus on topics related to job search/career development. To date, more than one hundred women have participated; many are new to the library.

- Worked with **Red Hook Community Arts Network, Bard College, the Chamber of Commerce and Oblong Books** to create “**Read Local Red Hook Literary Festival,**” a celebration of literature and writers of the Hudson Valley, bringing hundreds of people to the area. Local businesses reported their best sales days during the festival.
- Partnered with **Bard College’s Palestinian Youth Initiative** for RHPL to have a mural exchange with Children’s Library of Mas’Ha, resulting in the creation of a Sister City relationship with Mas’Ha, West Bank. The director of the library sits on the **Town of Red Hook’s Sister City Committee**, which is in the process of adding a Sister City in Israel.
- Partnered with the **New York State Department of Health** and the **Maternal Infant Services Network** to provide assistance to people struggling to navigate the New York Health Exchange (Affordable Care Act). More than 300 people enrolled; more than 100 attended information sessions.
- Partnered with **Bard College and four other libraries in three counties** to bring “The Big Read” to Red Hook. Hundreds of people attended dozens of events over the course of six weeks; many were new faces to the library.
- Partnered with the **Red Hook Historical Society** to celebrate Red Hook’s Bicentennial. More than 8,000 people participated in more than 25 events over three months, raising the profile of the town as well as the library, and bringing a renewed sense of pride and economic value to the community.
- Partnered with **Dutchess County One-Stop** to provide one-on-one resume and job search help free of charge to the Red Hook community.
- In 2012 RHPL created the **Digital Native Program**, using high school volunteers to help patrons with basic computer skills. In 2013, the 22 libraries of Dutchess County banded together and applied for a grant to implement RHPL’s program, retitled Teen Geeks, county-wide. The program was funded again in 2014, and singled out for recognition during the County Executive’s State of the County address.
- To increase volunteerism, RHPL collaborated with **Bard College and Red Hook Central School District** to create the now annual “Volunteer Fair.” In the past two years, RHPL has recruited more than 50 volunteers, who have given more than 3,000 hours of service.

AWARDS

In 2015, RHPL had the great honor of being named a finalist for the “Best Small Library in America” award given by Library Journal and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, in recognition of its innovative programs and increase in attendance and circulation.

In 2013 & 2014, *Library Journal* awarded RHPL a 5-star rating, based on the growth RHPL had generated through outstanding service to our community, and by being proactive and eager collaborators. In 2014, more than 11,500 people attend 634 programs at the library. The library engages the community in creative and innovative ways, prompting the mayor of Red Hook to declare the library a vital part of what he calls the “Red Hook Renaissance.”

MAKER SPACES

In 2015, RHPL partnered with Bard College’s Stevenson Library and Red Hook Central School District to take part in the New York cohort of **ILEAD USA**. This opportunity provided the three organizations to work together to plan and develop a mobile maker space program. The team began piloting mobile maker programs in June 2015, holding Maker Labs at the **Red Hook High School Library** during lunch hour. The programs proved to be so popular, RHPL, Bard College and Red Hook Central School District joined forces to provide after-school programming at the high school in the fall.

In the summer of 2015, RHPL partnered with **Bard College**, who provided several 20-something student interns and a van to lead science and maker camps in the summer of 2015, including one at the Town’s Rec Park. The collaboration with the Town’s Rec Park was so successful, the head of the Rec Park camp ended up providing additional money from her budget to expand the program, and requested Maker Programs be expanded additional days. Due to the excitement and interest in the Maker programs, the team has begun applying for additional funding through grants to continue a wide variety of programs. RHPL has begun doing programming at the Farmer’s Market each Saturday, and is working with Red Hook law enforcement to identify areas in the community that could benefit from additional after school programming.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

When the opportunity came to apply for the American Library Association grant, Libraries Transforming Communities, RHPL was lucky enough to be one of ten libraries nationwide chosen to take part in the initiative. As part of the Harwood Institute training, the Red Hook cohort learned that its focus on community and collaboration was just the first step on a longer journey, and that to truly transform as individuals, as an organization and a community RHPL would have to make a priority of community engagement work, which began in the summer of 2014. It is this work which has had the most profound impact on the library and its community.

Community engagement has changed RHPL's understanding of how the library serves the community. Instead of spending time marketing and pushing library services to the community, the cohort began harvesting information from the community, asking residents what their aspirations were for the community – not for the library. . Instead of being preoccupied with communicating the value of the library, it was more important to be valuable to the community. This subtle shift in orientation meant the library heard different information than what had been collected in focus groups and surveys. The community was concerned about the lack of leadership and volunteer opportunities for teens and 20-somethings, and that due to a lack of good public transportation, many people were isolated from the services provided by the library. People were concerned about traffic safety – Route 9 and Route 199 cut through the heart of the village – and because the one stoplight in town has extended delays, drivers cut through side streets, where there are no sidewalks to keep children and elderly walkers safe.

What do these issues have to do with the library? Plenty. While it's not in RHPL's purview to change the timing of a stoplight or install sidewalks in the village, it could communicate those concerns to the appropriate agencies that could – and are – making those changes. The library decided to focus on creating volunteer and leadership opportunities for teens and 20-somethings, and to bring programs and opportunities to people who may not have regular access to the library.

While community engagement work has just begun in the past year, the results have been astounding. As other organizations and stakeholders saw the library's success, they reached out and asked for help to breathe new life into struggling organizations. RHPL has begun working with these organizations to help them grow and thrive as the library has, sharing the community engagement tools taught by the Harwood Institute.

Engagement – a deep understanding of and commitment to the community – is what drives RHPL. By digging deeper, and learning more about what people wants to see – not just in a library, but in the community – the library will continue to strengthen and solidify its position not just as a valued community resource, but as a positive change agent and vehicle for innovation. Red Hook Public Library has made a choice to put the community at the heart of our library, where it belongs.