



I Love My Librarian!
2011 Award

NOMINATION FOR Venetia V. Demson

Chief, Adaptive Services, DC Public Library and Regional Librarian, DC Regional Library for the Blind & Physically Handicapped DC Public Library, Adaptive Services Division Washington, D.C.

NOMINATED BY

Oral Miller
Washington, D.C.

1. Please tell us in 2-3 sentences why your nominee should win this award. What sets him/her apart?

Venetia V. Demson is a dedicated librarian and disability advocate who has built an innovative Adaptive Services Program at the DC Public Library (DCPL) that serves as an international model. Coalitions of library representatives from Poland, South Korea, Mongolia, and other locations around the world have come to the Division through the state department to hear presentations on the services that Venetia has developed at the library. One of the program models started during her administration at the library, AccessibilityCamp, which had its first ever incarnation at the MLK library in 2009, has been modeled at 12 locations around the globe. Her leadership and librarianship inspires the staff and mobilizes the community. Coming from a background in both business and librarianship, she brings a vibrancy and pioneering aspect tempered by expertise and an attention to organizational structure and security. The Adaptive Services Division has grown exponentially under her leadership, evolving into a cohesive familial unit, attracting greatly expanded support from the community, and serving as an inspiration to other programs. The end result is a library program that bridges the digital divide, and innovates practices in the disability community that chart a course forward for libraries in general.

2. Please list a few ways in which the nominee has helped you and made your experience of the library a positive one. For instance, did the nominee inspire in you a love for literature; assist you in a project or finding other information?

Venetia's partnership with Columbia Lighthouse for the Blind, produced the Braille Book Club for Kids, Grades 1-6, Chess Club and Camp Lighthouse at the library. Nine kids attended monthly, visited the White House and were visited by Kareem Dale, Special Assistant for Disability Policy to President Obama. Five adult Braille readers mentor the kids, and parents attend. Two testimonials follow:

Shahinaz Gadalla, mother of book club participant Nesma Aly: "Joining the Braille book club was an eye opener for me, and a great help for my daughter. I learned for the first time that my daughter has a long way to go, but seeing other children her age reading Braille so well was encouraging for her. The supportive environment throughout the book club helped my daughter to identify some role models. This was the right start for her. I feel the Braille Book Club is a very special activity. This activity initiated a community through which children and families connected. Selecting the DC Regional Library for the Blind's staff as partners in this activity opened all the wonderful resources in the library to the book club participants." Shahinaz adds, "We just came from the NFB (National Federation of the Blind – Maryland) convention and Nesma won the Jennifer Baker award for her efforts to learn Braille and overcome the learning challenges she faced because of her medical situation. Did the Braille Book Club play a part? Definitely yes. But I see it a little differently. It is not the book club, as an activity, but the personnel organizing the book club. You definitely played a direct role in Nesma's Braille literacy. Because I deeply believe in that I wrote (this) testimonial about how the book club changed our life."

Another parent, Indah Setiowati, reflects: "She will not miss a single meeting, unless she is sick." Indah also recognizes that her daughter has more friends since joining the book club and is more confident in her Braille reading abilities. Andrea reached beyond her comfort zone to submit 2 book reviews to the Sheila Robertson Prize contest held at Chevy Chase Library this summer. "Andrea does not have a target to win the competition, but she's happy that she could be part of it... although she was not on the winners list, she "won" confidence from Venetia to participate. Thank you for your trust in her and thank you for all your belief in her... she had a wonderful birthday celebration to remember! The troop also talked about it all the way home...they're so proud to be able to print their names in Braille and not to mention the free book they got."

Sue Bengtson said "I can't thank you enough for including my brownie troop in your December bookclub meeting. The girls had a great time and learned a lot about books and about Braille. At our regular meeting the following week the girls couldn't say enough about how much they'd enjoyed the book club. It also inspired them to

try some new things in our summer book club including more time for reading aloud and trying some new genres of fiction. Thanks too for the bags you put together for the girls and the wonderful books. The girls told me their favorite part was "meeting the triplets and getting their names in Braille."

AccessibilityCampDC was the first ever unconference on web accessibility. The audience included web developers, and technology users. The outcome has been a grassroots network in the local web accessibility and adaptive technology communities that centers on the use of library services and programs, and a movement to mirror this structure at the national and international levels.

"Venetia,... thank you for ... putting on such a great event... I learned more about the extent to which you and your department truly contributed toward making the event happen... this was the largest attended barcamp focused exclusively on accessibility ever held to date. The event has set a standard...for that you can be extremely proud. I am equally impressed with the level of service your Library provides to the blind/visually impaired community...

Jennison Mark Asuncion, Adaptech, October 12, 2009"

Venetia partnered with American University for a program on Learning Disabilities. Todd Carney, co-organizer, said: " You ... are doing great work and making a huge difference in ... peoples' lives... Thank you."

Venetia partnered with the DC Public Schools to host DC VIP Teens, a weekly after school program: "You two are nothing short of awesome!!!! Thank you from the bottom of my heart for all your support/assistance/dedication to improving outcomes for DCPS youth with sensory impairments..."

Norma Villanueva, Supervisor of Low Incidence Disabilities, DC Public Schools

3. How has the librarian made a difference in the community? Please be specific.

"Since Venetia has come the division, which was always a quality service provider, it has advanced to the point of being an outstanding center for obtaining accessible materials, learning the latest about current technologies of relevance to blind and visually impaired people, the exchange of information relating to technology and other educational applications, and the introduction and development of learning techniques of enormous importance to students who are growing up in the modern age."

Oral Miller, President of the District of Columbia Council of the Blind

Freddie L. Peaco, President, Metropolitan Washington Ear

Marilyn Lutter, Recording Secretary, District of Columbia Council of the Blind

Venetia partnered with DC Rehabilitation Services Administration in FY2010 to create two paid internships for college students with disabilities in Adaptive Services as Adaptive Technology Trainers. During six weeks over the summer,

Christopher Corrigan and two interns—Sterling Henry and Miriam Brinley—developed new training curricula for volunteer trainers. The curricula cover the software being made available at library public computers, and are designed for novice computer users. Curricula cover basic internet with JAWS screen reading software, email with JAWS, and Microsoft Word with JAWS. Additional lessons cover Openbook scanning/reading software, and Wynn Wizard software for learning disabilities. This internship program continues successfully into 2011.

American Association of People with Disabilities Summer Intern: The DC Public Library's Adaptive Services Division hosted an AAPD intern summer (2011). Our intern helped us craft a disability resource list, entered data, helped manage the collection, and brought a unique perspective to our clubs. "Thank you again for hosting an AAPD intern this summer. Your support is crucial to increasing the number of people with disabilities engaged in meaningful employment opportunities. I truly appreciate your consistent support of the internship program and look forward to working with you for years to come."

Dana Fink, Program Assistant , American Association of People with Disabilities (AAPD)

Venetia delivered presentations at two national conferences in 2010

In May 2010, at the NLS biennial conference in Des Moines – "Barcamps, Unconferences and #A11y: Web Developers and LBPH Consumers Talk About Accessibility." Several attendees were eager for copies of the presentation. Here's a comment from Claudia Koenig, Outreach Advisor, Office of Commonwealth Libraries, Bureau of Library Development, Pennsylvania Dep't. of Education: "Hi! It was great seeing you in Des Moines. I will remember you in the corner in the bar working every night before giving this Unconference Power Point! ☐ Can you send (it) to me? ...I've already told my Division Chief about this idea and he wants to see it too."

In August, at the 2010 Society of American Archivists Conference in Washington, DC – "The Adaptive Technology Program at DC Public Library." From session organizer Daria D'Arienzo: "Dear Patrick and Venetia, Our collective thanks for being part of our first SAA Accessibility Awareness Forum. It was a success, with more than 61 attendees... We are grateful for your collegial support and contributions on behalf of SAA."

Venetia made a presentation to the board of the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) on 2.2.2011 which was well received, and featured guest accessibility managers from local arts organizations and museums. The IMLS responded: " Thank you very much for your excellent presentation... We learned a good deal from your insights and field experiences. What especially came across, and this was pointed out to me afterwards by our staff, was your passion for this work. You really promoted the spirit of inclusiveness, equality, and community... " Presentations to US State Department Visitors From Korea and Poland in FY2010 Adaptive Services hosted Polish visitors in August from two NGOs working to promote equality for people with disabilities in Poland. The group included the

Deputy Mayor of Krakow and representatives from University of Krakow visiting to explore the subject of "Equal Rights for People with Disabilities." They said: "Very good. Expectations met, and exceeded. More time would have been welcome. Worth recommending to other groups." Jill Eynon, Program Officer, Meridian International Center, Sept 14, 2010

They also hosted a group of 6 representatives of the Korea Blind Union, Siloam Center, who followed up with this email: "It was a great honor for us to visit the Martin Luther King Library and meet with you for building collaborative relationship on behalf of Korea Blind Union." Dong-Ic Choi, President, Korea Blind Union, Chief Director, Siloam Center for the Visually Handicapped, October 03, 2010
Partnership with SchoolTalk and DC Partners in Transition, www.dctransition.org
2nd Annual Moving Forward Together Secondary Transition Forum

On 9/25/2010 at the MLK Library, 129 people, including educators, parents, students and community members joined together for a day of information sharing, community-building, and problem-solving about the transition of DC youth with disabilities into post-secondary education, training, employment, and independence.

4. How has the library, and the nominee, improved the quality of your life?

Venetia Demson makes a difference in the community everyday. She is tireless in her work supporting people with disabilities in DC. I am Executive Director of a local non-profit and I have worked with her for the past two years on various projects related to youth and young adults with disabilities. She is one of those people who never hesitates to look for creative ways make the resources of the library available to everyone. She has created a culture in the Adaptive Services Division that responds to requests with the attitude of not whether or not to help, but "let's figure out a way to do this, because it is the right thing to do." I can't say enough positive things about her work and compassion. She embodies what a library should be – a safe haven for all and a portal to the world and the resources we all need to be successful and enrich our lives. No task is too big or too small to get her full attention. She has helped individual students get internships with the library, partnered with the local school system to have a weekly youth group for blind and low vision teens, and supported numerous community programs that serve individuals with disabilities and their families. On the other end of the spectrum, she has arranged for the MLK library to host a community forum and fair on Secondary Transition for youth with disabilities that will have over 600 participants over a 2-day event. Venetia didn't just say "yes, you can use this space." She fully invested in making this event successful through the support of her staff, facilitating the involvement of other parts of the library, helping with outreach, making connections with other partners, and organizing an assistive technology portion of the program. I enthusiastically add my voice to endorse Venetia Demson for the I Love My Librarian Award. To quote my 10-year old son, "She is AWESOME!"

Leila Peterson, Executive Director, SchoolTalk, Inc.

Venetia Demson has been proactive in reaching out to the District of Columbia Public Schools to ensure that students who are blind or visually impaired have their unique needs met. She has worked tirelessly in a solutions-oriented manner with the school system and other DC Government agencies and community partners and organizations to stand in the gap for these young people. She has made the library a warm, welcoming, and caring place to go to use adaptive technology, to do homework, and to socialize with other individuals with similar impairments. She has arranged for successful members of the community who also happen to have disabilities to speak with the students and encourage and even mentor them. Venetia has encouraged literacy and the joy of reading. She has modeled responsiveness, courtesy, and diplomacy to her staff and insists on the highest customer service standards. There are no words sufficient to describe how Venetia's efforts, compassion, and work ethic have made the library a better place.

Norma Villanueva, Program Director, Office of Special Education, D.C. Public Schools

Participant Sammie Clay says about the Talking Book Club: "In my opinion, one of the best features of the department is its book club... I have learned a great deal from the books we read and the discussions which ensue. However, I enjoy most of all, the camaraderie and social contact which allow people with similar afflictions to meet and share information about useful resources and new technologies which will enhance our independence. I think the book club is another way devised by the personnel of the Adaptive Services department to make this possible for us... I don't know what I would do if the library wasn't there for me. I wish there was a designated Adaptive Services Staff day each year and I could afford to take all of them out to lunch. That's what happens when we are poor -- we can't reward the people who do the most for us. Bummer!!"

Partnership with the Prevention of Blindness Society of Greater Washington (POB)
"Don't Lose Sight To Glaucoma":

Adaptive Services partners with POB each year on a program to bring eye health information to our community. In 2010, a panel of doctors addressed 100 audience members on this eye disease that affects an estimated 2.2 million Americans, with African Americans over age 40 included in the "high risk" group. Program included free glaucoma screenings and exhibits by assistive technology vendors. "Venetia is Wonderful!" Janet Morrison, Prevention of Blindness Society of Metropolitan Washington

5. How does the nominee make the library a better place?

Venetia is the Regional Librarian for the DC Regional Library for the Blind and Physically Handicapped. She oversaw the distribution of the new digital Talking Book players and the rapid expansion of the BARD (Braille and Audio Reading Download) service. She worked with architects to redesign The Adaptive Services Division, physically restructuring the space to support her vision. This increased the number of adaptive workstations from 3 to 12, added a learning lab space with an FM loop amplification system for the hearing impaired, created a Braille literacy corner, and installed an updated audiobook recording booth with digital recording capability.

Over her time at the library, Venetia brought video phones, captioned telephones and handheld amplifiers into the library. She encouraged the initiation of many Deaf programs including ASL story hours and Deaf Community Friends of the DC Public Library, creating a friendly atmosphere where Deaf individuals feel comfortable working and socializing at the library. In June 2010, the DC Public Library and the District of Columbia Association of the Deaf co-sponsored an afternoon seminar, "Libraries, Access, and ASL Literature: The Deaf Community Shares Our Not-So-Silent Stories," in conjunction with the 2010 ALA Annual Conference. The goal of the seminar was to help librarians create libraries that support the deaf community's efforts to be understood as a cultural and linguistic minority, and to have resources on the shelves that would accurately reflect the deaf community's culture and language.

From Alice Hagemeyer, Chair of Special Events Committee (SEC) of Deaf Community Friends of the D.C. Public Library (DCF) and Founding President of Library for Deaf Action (LDA) and FOLDA (library friends) : "...the committee was very fortunate to have this opportunity to work with...the Adaptive Services Division for creating such a unique program model for other libraries. We have made history together! I am sure that the DC deaf community will want to continue to share ideas for your future programs and exhibits that they would like to see at the library throughout the year. With my heartfelt congratulations and thanks! Alice"

Ignite the Spark Summer Adaptive Technology Camp 2011: In partnership with Columbia Lighthouse for the Blind, the camp familiarized 12 kids who are visually impaired and blind, grades 4 through 8, with the internet. During this one week camp, children gained basic internet knowledge, learned about internet safety, conducted internet scavenger hunts, took tactile tours of the Spy Museum and the National Portrait Gallery, downloaded Talking Books, played Braille Bingo, and much more! What the kids really liked: "Free food - Spy Museum - Victor Reader Stream and BARD (downloadable Talking Books) - internet safety - enjoyed meeting everyone - more field trips next year because no one likes to sit in front of a computer all day..." "Thanks for everything!" S. Winston, Manager, Children's Department, Columbia Lighthouse for the Blind.

The Adaptive Technology Program trains volunteers to work one on one with LBPH patrons to learn how to download NLS books to specialized audiobook players such as the Victor Reader Stream, and use adaptive software and technology available at the library to access computer and print resources. Twice monthly Saturday Technology Training Sessions (STTS) offer opportunities for group adaptive technology training and training in use of library resources, these sessions are archived and available on the web and from the STTS blog.

Game Night includes accessible Scrabble; Bingo; Cards, Trivia, Chess and Computer Word games.

“...I must say I really enjoyed game night on Monday evening. The scrabble was lots of fun, the setting was quiet but yet very social with good conversation...and tasty snacks. I really enjoyed the atmosphere. Thank you and the staff for sponsoring these kind of activities.”

--Freddie Peaco, Metropolitan Washington Ear, President

Venetia made possible the acquisition of the one country's most comprehensive library collections of Adaptive Technology. The library is now the leading example of an Adaptive Technology Workstation lab and demonstration collection.” Patrick Timony, Adaptive Technology Library, DC Public Library

Eye-Heart Connection was a 2011 Black History Month event promoting heart health through eye exams. Changes in the retina seen during a dilated eye exam may indicate signs of coronary artery disease, stroke, diabetic retinopathy and other health concerns. Venetia partnered with The Prevention of Blindness Society of Metropolitan Washington, and doctors and other professionals from Howard University Hospital. The program included presentations, workshops, exhibits, health screenings and ASL interpretation.