

REPORTER

ILLINOIS LIBRARY ASSOCIATION

DECEMBER 2017

VOLUME XXXV ISSUE 6



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Illinois Library Association

33 W. Grand Ave., Ste. 401 | Chicago, IL 60654-6799
phone: 312-644-1896 | fax: 312-644-1899
e-mail: ila@ila.org | www.ila.org

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2017 Sylvia Murphy Williams Scholars!

Nearly all of this year's American Library Association (ALA) Spectrum Scholars who are enrolled in graduate programs in information and library science in Illinois were able to attend the Illinois Library Association (ILA) Annual Conference in October, thanks to support from the fund established in honor of the late Sylvia Murphy Williams, 2002 ILA President. Seven of them contributed these impressions of the conference, and we welcome all of them as future members of the profession.



Front row, left to right: **Jaime Bravo**, Dominican University, School of Information Studies; **Aldo Vasquez**, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, School of Information Sciences; **Van McGary**, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, School of Information Sciences; **Sharon Han**, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, School of Information Sciences; **Kelly S. Campos**, Dominican University, School of Information Studies; **Siobhan A. McKissic**, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, School of Information Sciences; and **Darnetta Bolton**, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, School of Information Sciences.

Back row: **Marcus A. Berry**, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, School of Information Sciences

Not pictured: **Christina D. Bush**, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, School of Information Sciences; **Kristin Lansdown**, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, School of Information Sciences; **Carli V. Lowe**, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, School of Information Sciences; and **Joan J. Parker**, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, School of Information Sciences

Since 2003, ILA has awarded ninety-nine scholarships.



Kelly Campos

There is a peculiar phenomenon in comedy that I refer to as a recognition laugh. When we see something that is of minor humor, but that we recognize from our own lives, we laugh louder. We feel that humor deep in our bones. I had a similar experience at the ILA Annual Conference. No, I didn't laugh "at" presentations. All of the presentations I attended were very good, insightful, and inspiring, but everyone will tell you about that. At this conference, I had a moment of bone-deep recognition. Although it was through ALA that I received the amazing honor of the Spectrum Scholarship, the SMW award from ILA made it real to me, when I knew I would meet a local group of my peers in person. I grew up in Detroit, a majority black city, surrounded by people who look like me. Life took me away from home, and I now live in spaces that are more reflective of the American experience we all see on TV: majority white. I adore my friends, my coworkers, and the patrons I serve, but the Spectrum Scholarship and the SMW mentorship program have given me something I didn't realize I was missing so much. I now have a network of people that intrinsically understand not just the library-related issues, joys, concerns, and dramas; but also the ones related to race. Even though we do not share a monolithic mind, I know that the people in this cohort, and those who have gone before, have all dealt with facets of the same issues: being the sole representative of your ethnic group, being looked to as the answer for diversity, having your voice valued only if it fits the desired narrative. These heavy issues were all lightened by the camaraderie of the group of Spectrum Scholars I had the pleasure of being with at the ILA conference. Often, just knowing that someone else is in your position lightens the burdens you feel. Not only did this lighten my load, it gave me the ability to reach out to people who also have some of the same concerns and dreams, so that I can help to lighten theirs. And I hope they feel it all the way down to their bones.



Sharon Han

I would like to thank the Illinois Library Association, the ILA Diversity Committee, and the SMW award program for inviting me to this year's ILA Annual Conference. Each person I met during this conference treated me with kindness and enthusiasm, and this experience reaffirmed that I made the right decision to pursue my dream of becoming a librarian. As an aspiring public librarian, I was blown away by the knowledge, creativity, and openness of the presenters and attendees. Since this was my first library conference, my schedule was packed with a variety of different programs. Some highlights included *Let's Do Lunch: Serving Summer Meals at Your Library*, *We Welcome Everyone—Inclusive Readers' Advisory*, and *Tween to Teen: Collaboration in Action*. Vernā Myers was an invigorating opening speaker, as I was reminded that open dialogue will play a key part in cultivating the library as an inclusive community space and workplace. I am grateful to have met my fellow awardees and members of the Diversity Committee throughout the conference. My SMW mentor, Miguel Ruiz, is very supportive and inspires me to pursue my passion in community engagement. This has been a truly humbling experience, and I hope to pay it forward in the future.



Kristin Lansdown

I am lucky enough to live in Chicago and had the opportunity to attend the ALA Annual Conference this summer. As a result, I had a better idea of what to expect and what I was looking for out of my ILA conference experience. Some of my favorite sessions included *Dealing in Diversity: Proactively Serving Communities Through Authentic Representation*, *What Now?: Diversity, Intellectual Freedom and Activism*, and *Project Middle School: Bringing School and Public Libraries Together to Benefit Students*. The conference made it clear that diversity and inclusion are priorities within the field, based on the fruitful selection of sessions pertaining to the topic. I am currently working in a public library, so I was happy to learn about a number of programs and tools that I will be incorporating into my work. After the DiversiTEA event, I was able to meet with my mentor who quelled my anxieties about the breadth of my interests across both academic libraries and youth services in both public libraries and school libraries. She has worked in areas that interest me and currently holds a position that is one of my career goals. I have no doubt that she'll continue to be a great resource as I move forward in my career! I look forward to continue participating in ILA to help shape future scholars' experiences at conferences and beyond.

By Elaina
Dague

Homewood Library staffer wins national Spectrum Scholarship

July 10, 2017 - 14:25

0 comments

Homewood Public Library paraprofessional Kelly Campos has been selected one of 61 national winners of the Spectrum Scholarship.

The award, made by the American Library Association, will cover her tuition at Dominican University where she is a student in the master's program in library and information studies. The scholarship also includes a trip to New Orleans for the 2018 ALA convention.

The Spectrum Scholars program recognizes exceptional and diverse students for their commitment to diversity, interest in a librarian career, community outreach, academic ability and achievements and leadership potential.

The Detroit native moved around pursuing her interests in theater, music and the arts. She calls that period her "gypsy lifestyle. I've lived in nine places in seven years." She came to the South Suburbs in 2004 when her husband, Timothy, took a job in the area.

Campos admits her moves made it tough to stay focused on school.

"I had pretty much given up (on higher education)," she said, but staying in one place gave her the impetus to finish. She earned a bachelor's degree in liberal arts from Roosevelt University in 2013.

Campos started working at two local libraries in 2014, one of which was the Homewood Public Library where she now works full time. Being in that environment convinced her librarian was the right profession for her.



Kelly Campos, a member of the Homewood library staff, was recently awarded a Spectrum Scholarship, one of 61 awarded nationwide. (Photo by Marilyn Thomas/H-F Chronicle)

Her love of literature, the written word and stories was the connecting thread.

Campos said, "I knew what I wanted to be when I grew up: a rock star librarian."

In her Spectrum Scholarship essay Campos said: "Acting as a bridge between the information and the fun, the word and the story, the page and imagination is my highest calling."

As a youth services paraprofessional, Campos focuses on programming for third to sixth graders.

"Learning without knowing you're learning is what I'm all about," and her folder full of program ideas is proof.

For example, Campos developed programs that connect art and math using paint, ancient Egyptian math and the Fibonacci sequence.

Next up is a karaoke party July 12. The kids program starts at 4:30 p.m. and teens and adults at 6:30 p.m. Bring or song, or sing along with one of the library's musical selections, she said.

Campos is also planning a Slime Science program Sept. 19 that will have kids make foamy, magnetic and regular slime and learn the science behind each one. Registration is being accepted at homewoodlibrary.org.

HOMewood PUBLIC LIBRARY SPECTRUM SCHOLARSHIP AMERICAN LIBRARY ASSOCIATION

Library Scholarship Winner Seeks Literacy Activism

MARCH 30, 2018 BY ADMIN

LEAVE A COMMENT



Kelly Campos

Kelly Campos (BS, '13) has found her calling in literacy activism; a prestigious national scholarship has made her goal of becoming a librarian a reality.

Campos, who joined a south suburban public library's youth services staff shortly after graduating, is one of 61 winners of the American Library Association's 2017 Spectrum Scholarship.

"Every class I took at Roosevelt had a social justice aspect," said Campos, who earned her degree in liberal studies. "It got me thinking that librarianship, at its core, is all about literacy activism."

Now a youth services programmer at the Homewood Public Library in Homewood, Illinois, Campos believes libraries should be community-gathering spaces.

"I am interested in building communities through library services," said Campos, who believes a librarian should be someone who opens new avenues, particularly for youth, through books, audio, visual and online information, and social media sources that they might not get at home.

"I'd like to diversify what's available in libraries in order to better reflect the diversity of a library's community."

Kelly Campos (BS, '13), Youth Services Programmer, Homewood Public Library

"I'd like to diversify what's available in libraries in order to better reflect the diversity of a library's community," she said.

Over the summer, Campos engaged members of the Homewood community by inviting one of her Roosevelt adjunct professors, Michele Hoffman Trotter, to speak on the timely topic of climate change.

"I think Kelly will make a great librarian. She's already doing the work, really engaging the community in the topic of climate change over the summer," said Hoffman Trotter, an instructor in Roosevelt's Sustainability Studies program and one of Campos' mentors.

"Kelly is highly motivated and her quest for knowledge is quite intense," Hoffman Trotter said. "I'm not surprised at all that she received this competitive scholarship."

An adult student who grew up in Detroit's theatre and arts community, Campos greatly admires the work of fellow Roosevelt alumna Carla Hayden (BA, '73), the first African American female librarian to lead the Library of Congress in Washington, D.C.

"Carla Hayden has been all about equal access to information," Campos said. "I agree that we need to widen the pool of resources available at our libraries so that we have a wider pool of enlightened people."

Campos is currently a graduate student earning her master's in library and information studies at Dominican University. She plans to graduate in 2018.

FILED UNDER: ALUMNI NEWS, FALL 2017, FEATURE 4

REPORTER

ILLINOIS LIBRARY ASSOCIATION

FEBRUARY 2019

VOLUME XXXVII ISSUE 1



The Room Where It It Happens: Planning a “Hamiltunes: An American Sing-Along” Program for Libraries

On a Saturday night last December, the audience at Homewood Public Library was enlivened by an intergenerational group of patrons performing on stage. By the third song, the audience clapped and yelled as they enthusiastically heard the first line: “I am not throwing away my shot!” It took only a limited amount of encouragement from the emcee for the audience to spell out the name of the main character: A-L-E-X-A-N-D-E-R. That night, the revolution was in full swing as performers and audience members interacted for the library’s third “Hamiltunes: An American Sing-Along” program.

REWIND

“Hamiltunes” is a sing-along event that originated in Los Angeles in late 2015 by Hamiltunes LA, a nonprofit that began as a group of friends who had started singing songs from the Broadway musical *Hamilton* at public gatherings. In June 2017, Homewood Public Library’s youth programming librarian Kelly Campos was on Twitter when *Hamilton* show creator Lin-Manuel Miranda tweeted a link to a press release on BroadwayWorld.com.

It mentioned the release of *The Hamilton Instrumentals* as well as the show producers’ authorization of a free sing-along program through Hamiltunes LA. Campos emailed the group immediately to sign up. A couple of months later, Hamiltunes LA approved the one-year licensing agreement. Homewood then paid for music licensing through ASCAP and purchased the instrumental tracks. The library set a December 2017 date for its first licensed event.

Campos and Ashley Sander, the library’s event coordinator, collaborated on ways to make their program a celebration of both the show and the talent in the community. Because the “Hamiltunes” agreement was written for individuals and not libraries, they researched how Hamiltunes LA first started and how other libraries had done *Hamilton*-related events before the press release. While there are different ways to do the program such as regular karaoke and curated performances, they decided to run the event as a sing-along with a participant sign-up lottery that would be open to anyone ages eight and older. Doing it that way allowed them to reach a wider audience with varying ages and backgrounds. “When people can unite around a fandom, they immediately have common ground,” said Campos.

[continued on page 52]

RISE UP

The library opened audience registration two months ahead of each sing-along. An additional link on the registration page led to a Google Form for performer sign-up. Children under the age of 13 needed parental permission to participate. Beginning with the second “Hamiltunes,” participants signed up for an unlimited amount of parts within as many songs as they wanted, as opposed to just three for the whole show. An additional note stated that performers were required to sing the ensemble parts from backstage.

Although the form included a question about the confidence level of a participant’s talent, Campos and Sander were more focused on ensuring that there would be various ages performing at the same time. The age spread during all three events was between 8 and 65. Campos notified participants about two weeks in advance of their songs and parts. Participants usually did not know nor met each other until the night of each sing-along. One participant came from middle Indiana and drove two hours to perform at the library for the original event.

“[‘Hamiltunes’] allows folks who may not have a chance to perform on stage a place to show off their skills as well as create space for folks to overcome fears of singing in front of others,” stated Hamiltunes LA cabinet member Jack Kelly in an email interview.

If someone received a part that they realized they were not comfortable with, they contacted Campos so she could reassign it. She mentioned how a nine-year-old received two parts and songs in the first event but decided to drop one. The part he kept was Hercules Mulligan’s rap in “Yorktown.”

“He was really nervous about dropping the f-bomb. His parents were like, ‘It’s okay, it’s for the show. You don’t have to do it, but it’s okay,’” Campos explained. Meanwhile, the teenagers rooted for him backstage and gave words of encouragement. “When he said it, everybody went ‘Ahhhhh!’ It was the most amazing thing. These are kids who would never see each other. Yet, they had this really great moment of togetherness around a show that they all love.”

THE ROOM WHERE IT HAPPENED

Campos and Sander originally thought the first “Hamiltunes” was going to be inside the library’s 68-capacity meeting room. They had to reconfigure their plans once the registration count surpassed it and reached 130, including 20 participants. They decided to stage that and subsequent sing-alongs in the adult services department, just outside of the meeting room. The room became a performer check-in and audience snack area. A section of the youth services area served as the backstage.

Four staff members, two teen volunteers, and one security monitor worked the program for all three runs. As the emcee, Campos made announcements, ran the music, held up audience participation signs, and fixed any onstage difficulties. A backstage manager kept performers on task, facilitated prop swapping, and reassigned absentee parts. Sander and a second staff member were co-house managers. They took care of audience check-in, gave out raffle tickets, replenished snacks, and managed offstage difficulties. The security monitor enforced the no-videotaping policy (per the licensing agreement). The teen volunteers set up and tore down the audience and snack areas. They also sang background vocals for some of the songs. For the third “Hamiltunes” in December 2018, two additional staff members helped the teen volunteers move shelves and set up seats.



The collage features four photographs of modern library interiors with colorful bookshelves, reading areas, and interactive displays. Overlaid on the collage is a dark blue rectangular box containing the following text:

DESIGNING A BETTER FUTURE FOR LIBRARIES

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The stage included one stereo, two speakers, five microphones, five music stands, and five binders with the CD lyrics between the entrance of youth and adult services. Three additional song binders were located backstage next to the prop table.

For the first event, it took Homewood's team almost two hours to set up, with the biggest challenge at the time being how to smoothly run the sound system. Weeks in advance, Campos used Audacity, a free audio editing software, to rip both the instrumental and soundtracks and layer them. For each "Hamiltunes," the left speaker had the instrumental track on 100 percent volume, while the right speaker had 20 percent of the soundtrack's volume infused with 80 percent of the instrumentals' sound. She did this so performers heard their place in the songs. Campos also included fifteen seconds of silence between songs to give time for applause and character switching. Although there were syncing issues during that event, they were rectified in subsequent sing-alongs.

WHAT TIME IS IT?

The December 2018 program had a mixture of novice and advance performers with the majority of participants appearing to be under age 30. Additionally, there were smaller parts left open for audience members who wanted to participate onstage. Campos made a request for volunteers during each announcement before the first song. Three audience members signed up for the small parts and a couple of the ones left by absentees. Other performers took the remaining songs after the final call for audience volunteers.

Campos and Sander decided between the original and second events to include audience participation. At the December 2018 sing-along, Campos encouraged this by holding up signs with heavily repeated words and phrases that the audience could sing with the ensemble. The audience also sang along with the performers to songs that they knew by heart.

"We have gotten a lot of people who attended the program in the past who were not our regular patrons," Sander said. "They said, 'I didn't know libraries did things like this.' If it's gets them to come back to the library, then it's absolutely worthwhile."

The three-hour event included a fifteen-minute intermission to raffle off Hamilton-related swag such as *The Hamilton Mixtape CD* and *Hamilton: The Revolution*.



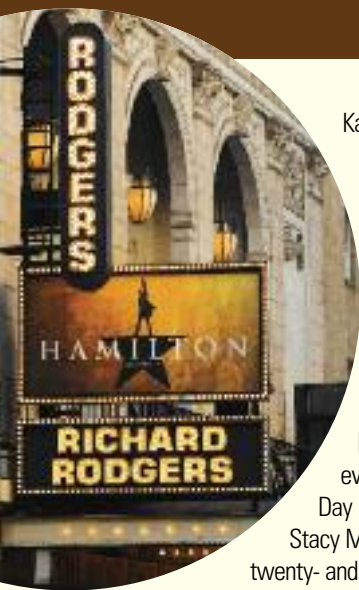
WHAT COMES NEXT

The December 2018 "Hamiltunes" was Homewood's final performance under Campos' licensing agreement with Hamiltunes LA. She and Sander believe that they may get another license down the road but for now would like to see what other libraries do with it. As part of a session at the ILA Annual Conference in October 2018 focusing on the iRead summer reading program, Campos presented the event as part of the committee's 2019 Summer Reading Program theme "It's Showtime at Your Library." An entry in the 2019 iREAD Resource Guide features more information about the licensing process and step-by-step advice about setting up an event. The Resource Guide and other iREAD materials are available for purchase at ireadprogram.org.

Campos, Sander, and Kelly agree that "Hamiltunes" is "the perfect library program" because it engages the community and includes history and the arts. "My advice would be to allow your community's passion to drive the sing-along, promote diversity and inclusion, and lean into the themes presented in the show," Kelly said.

Added Campos, "If nobody in your library is a fan of the show, do not attempt it. It only works if you have multiple staff members who love the show and want to get down and dirty with it because it's a lot of work. It's rewarding and fun. It gets people excited to come into the library." **ILA**

Tomorrow There'll Be More of Us: Hamiltunes Programs around the State



Karaoke inside a meeting room dimly lit by candles, a projector screen, and a summer evening's light. A free-flowing two-day event to help bring in the new year. A performance hosted by the local theatre association. These are the ways **Niles-Maine Public Library District, Oak Park Public Library, and Kankakee Public Library** brought "Hamiltunes" to their patrons.

Niles-Maine presented its first "Hamiltunes" event after hours the Friday after Independence Day in 2018. Adult and Outreach Services Assistant Stacy Moss-Paul, who does programming for twenty- and thirty-somethings, planned and marketed the event as costumes-optional karaoke. While one-fourth of the 50-member audience were within her target age group, the majority of patrons who volunteered to perform that evening were ages twelve through eighteen. The teens utilized the wireless mics by walking and singing up and down the aisle. Moss-Paul said it was one of the "most amazing" nights of her life.

"Many of these kids didn't know each other," Moss-Paul said. "They came together to make this night about having fun and engaging in history. Seeing the kids engage with each other and exchange numbers to make future plans, that was the most successful piece of it."

To create a colonial vibe, Moss-Paul dimmed the meeting room lights and placed candles in front of the projector screen. She also dressed as George Washington. A library staff member with past theatre experience served as the emcee. An intern worked on the technical aspects such as slide projection and music. Although Moss-Paul stated in the beginning of the program that the slides consisted of fifteen songs for anyone willing to sing them, participants sang those and others outside of the selection. The most requested tracks were "You'll Be Back" and "Non-Stop." In between performances, Moss-Paul asked trivia questions and had everyone sing "Happy Birthday" to a six-year-old audience member who also dressed as George Washington.

About six months earlier at Oak Park, Elementary School Services Librarian Genevieve Grove and Early Literacy Librarian Shelley Harris collaborated on a two-day, all-ages "Hamiltunes" sing-along in lieu of the children's department's annual New Year's celebrations. They knew third- and fourth-graders who were very interested in "Hamilton" and wanted to give them a kid-friendly atmosphere to perform. Each act took place during business hours on the last two days of 2017. Registration was not required; 80 patrons showed up on day one, almost half that on day two. Like Niles-Maine, anyone who wanted to sing in a mic did so and became song leaders.

For day one, Harris acted as house manager. She encouraged people to go onstage, gave information to patrons who came late, and directed people to the display and bibliography located in the back of the meeting room. The display included books about Hamilton, the time period, creative writing, and music theatre. For day two, Harris was both the house manager and emcee.

As emcee on day one, Grove (who also made the lyric slides) cued the music and the projected slides. She also managed the younger song leaders to ensure that they shared the mics as well as made sure there were additional mics on hand just in case others decided to become leaders mid-song.

"There was a girl up there singing 'Helpless' and she was by herself. Everybody else was singing along to it in the room. We knew we were getting to Hamilton's part." Grove explained. "Then this 25-year-old guy all of a sudden just grabbed a mic and was like 'yeah, I got this.' Everyone just went wild!"

Almost two weeks after Oak Park's program, the Kankakee Valley Theatre Association (KVTA) filled Kankakee Public Library's 240-capacity auditorium with people eager to participate in its ages 10 and up "Hamiltunes." KVTA Member and Past President Paula Sutter has partnered with the library for previous theatre events and thought the sing-along would be a good event to host there.

Sutter planned the after hours event, with assistance from KVTA Board Member Courtney Casteel, almost similar to the libraries. Like Homewood Public Library (see article), KVTA selected performers by lottery and did all the songs in one night. Like Niles-Maine and Oak Park, lyrics projected on screen. Like all three libraries, the majority of performers were 30 years old or younger. Unlike the libraries, 25 percent of the 50 performers had a theatre background. The remaining 75 percent had never been on stage until that night.

"['Hamiltunes'] helped introduce our theatre group to many new people," Sutter said. "As a result of that night, we have had several of the 'Hamiltunes' participants audition for our shows."

When asked about advice for future library programmers, both Moss-Paul and Grove suggested getting acquainted with hearing and reading the songs frequently during the planning stage. Adds Moss-Paul, "Talk to each other. Find out what things worked, what things didn't. Go see one for yourself. Understand how impactful [the show] is."

KVTA does not have another "Hamiltunes" in the works. Oak Park did a second sing-along early July 2018 but isn't planning a third one at this time. Niles-Maine plans to do its second "Hamiltunes" sometime this year.



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TAKE THE ASSESSMENT



Homewood library cohosts Cookies & Comics event with Homewood, Illinois, library

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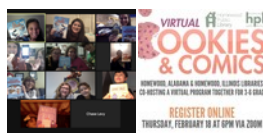


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Who doesn't love a get-together that focuses on graphic novels and delicious cookies?

In September of 2020, Laura Tucker, the Homewood Public Library Children's Librarian, received an email from Kelly Campos, who is also the Homewood Public Library Children's Librarian — in Homewood, Illinois.

That's right, the Homewood, Alabama Library has a sister library. A few Alabama library patrons had registered for Campos' virtual Cookies & Comics program on Zoom. A cool bonus of the Cookies & Comics event is that attendees get to pick up cookies. But how could the Homewood, Alabama, attendees get cookies for an event in Homewood, Illinois? Campos ordered cookies from Cookie Fix for the Alabama kids to pick up for that month's meeting. She also decided that this was too good of an opportunity to pass up, and invited Homewood, Alabama, to join in on the fun for future meetings. With programming at both libraries moving virtually, it was the perfect time to combine forces.

Cookies & Comics is a popular program for third through sixth graders at Homewood, Illinois, and it's a perfect fit for the comic-loving patrons of Homewood, Alabama, as well. The virtual event provides a space for kids and tweens to share their favorite graphic novels and recommend them to others. Past meetings have had general themes such as spooky, all about families, and wintery titles.

This spring, each meeting will focus on a specific book, and cookies will still be a vital part of the program. Kids who register for the program at Homewood, Illinois, pick up their cookies curbside, while Homewood, Alabama, patrons will pick theirs up at Cookie Fix on 18th Street the day of the program.

For the Feb. 18 meeting, authors and illustrators Alejandra Green and Fanny Rodriguez will join the virtual meeting fun. Their new graphic novel, *Fantastic Tales of Nothing*, is available for checkout at Homewood Public Library in Alabama. *Fantastic Tales of Nothing* is set in a fantastic land where humans and magical volken coexist peacefully—at least they try to. If your third through sixth grader likes magical and adventure graphic novels, both Homewood libraries [compiled a list of similar reads](#).

Think your child might be interested in attending Cookies & Comics? Alabamians can register at homewoodpubliclibrary.org/event/4736936.

"For years the two libraries have received each other's patron's confused phone calls and emails about programs that were happening in the other state," the Alabamian library said in a statement. "This time there is finally a program happening for both locations at once. Both libraries and librarians, are excited about this innovative partnership and hope to bring their communities together for many more virtual events."

For more information contact Laura Tucker at laura.tucker@homewoodpubliclibrary.org or 205-332-6616.

Submitted by Judith Wright.

by Submitted

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By Marilyn
Thomas

Library's Cookies & Comics a hit both north and south

🕒 November 10, 2020 - 20:58

💬 0 comments

The COVID-19 pandemic has led to a partnership between young readers in Homewood, Illinois, and Homewood, Alabama.

The village of Homewood already has a sister-city agreement with Homewood, Alabama, but the libraries' partnership for the Cookies & Comics program was born from online confusion.

"We get their calls a lot," and vice versa said Kelly Campos, youth programming librarian at the Homewood Public Library. A Google search doesn't necessarily distinguish one library's page from the other.



Graphic novel readers gather online for a monthly Cookies & Comics session that draws participants from Homewood, Illinois, and Homewood, Alabama. (Provided screenshot)

Cookies & Comics was first organized at the Homewood, Illinois, library about a year ago. Campos said she knew the program would draw an audience because the library's collection of the comics has high circulation numbers. Raina Telgemeier and Jonathan King are a few of the favorite authors.

"Some adults look down on graphic novels saying they're not real books, but they absolutely are and many graphic novels have a higher word content, a higher vocabulary than traditional novels," Campos explained. "They're just packaged differently, and they speak to kids in that visual genre, as well as the literary language, which is so important in today's world."

"It's just how kids think with emojis and movies and video games and TV. And, everything is visual as well as text, and graphic novels just really speak to that."

"Pre-COVID, I had a platter of cookies and we'd talk about the graphic novel we read and eat cookies," Campos said of the monthly Thursday evening discussions. "We read comics for all ages, and we'd have kids with their parents, single adults. It was a big mix of ages and interests and all different kinds of comics."

With COVID restrictions, Campos decided Zoom would be the best way to keep the program going. But, what about the cookies?

"At first, no cookies, and that disappointed me because that's the whole point of Cookies & Comics," she said. Campos asked participants to register and worked with Walt's Foods to make individual packets of cookies for each participant to pick up.

Then the program took an unexpected turn.

Campos sent a reminder note for a recent meeting and realized she had two names on the list she didn't recognize. Turns out they were sisters in Homewood, Alabama, responding to her note about picking up the cookies. They said they'd make their own cookies.

"If kids email me that they're so excited to come and they'll make their own cookies so they could still come, then I'm going to do everything I can to get them on the same page as everyone else," Campos said.

She found a bakery a few blocks from the Homewood, Alabama, library that agreed to package cookies for the sisters so they could participate like their counterparts in Homewood-North.

"It worked out perfectly and they came and it was a blast and we had a great discussion. After that, I was like this is going to keep happening," so Campos called the youth librarian in Alabama and the partnership was born.

"They take care of the cookies and registration on their end, and I'm doing the same," she said. Rather than reading one select book, the group is working off of themes with a collaborative book list online. This month's theme is families.

Campos said another plus to Zoom discussions is that it draws in the authors, who otherwise couldn't make a trip to Illinois or Alabama for a book club meeting.

Right now, there are about 14 participants on Zoom, but Campos said sometimes there are two or three participants per Zoom connection which is limiting discussion. She wants to keep the long-distance participation going, but it likely will move to being a local Cookies & Comics meeting one month and Zoom for north-south discussion the next month.

"We definitely will continue the partnership in some way," Campos said.

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