

LSTA Grant Makes Library Interpretation Service a Reality

Randi Weiss, Joe Sciacca, and Jan Ison

Lincoln Trail Libraries System

Lincoln Trail Libraries System (LTLS), Champaign (Ill.), has announced the launch of the PolyTalk Library Interpreters Network. Funded by a Library Services and Technology Act (LSTA) grant awarded to LTLS by the Illinois State Library, PolyTalk's goal is to enable non-English speaking library patrons to make full use of the resources of Illinois libraries. The project provides staff of Illinois libraries access to an online database of volunteer interpreters. Volunteers provide telephone-based interpretation to help the librarian and patron communicate with each other. Over seventy-five interpreters who speak more than twenty different languages are part of PolyTalk.

PolyTalk is the first statewide effort to provide interpretation services to all Illinois libraries. "Illinois libraries face a significant challenge communicating effectively with limited English-speaking patrons," says LTLS executive director Jan Ison. "Libraries need an efficient way to communicate with these users." Nearly one in five Illinois residents speaks a language other than English at home. The linguistic diversity of the communities served by Illinois libraries is increasing faster than the language capabilities of library staff.

PolyTalk will expand the level of service available to non-English speaking patrons by providing a secure database for library staff to locate and contact a volunteer interpreter fluent in the patron's language. Bilingual interpreters will provide real-time interpretation to make the resources of Illinois libraries accessible. In addition, PolyTalk includes a multilingual language kit to assist staff and patrons in navigating simple, library-specific interactions. Using the language kit, the librarian can negotiate the initial patron contact, identify the patron's language, inform him or her of the avail-

ability of the PolyTalk service, and provide an overview of library services in the patron's native language.

PolyTalk will increase library awareness and library services to previously underserved populations. LTLS expects a noticeable increase in library use, as well as the establishment of local networks of librarians, interpreters, and non-English speakers.

"Just think how helpful it would be for you to have an English language interpreter available if you visited a library in a foreign country," says project director Joe Sciacca. "PolyTalk can open up the world of library resources and services to thousands of non-English speaking Illinois residents."

Librarians in Illinois can begin using PolyTalk today by registering online for a staff account at www.polytalk.info. Once registered, librarians can use the database to locate an interpreter and contact them by phone to provide real-time interpretation.

LTLS is actively recruiting bilingual speakers to expand the network. Bilingual librarians and non-library staff are welcome to participate. Volunteer interpreters can complete the registration process online at www.polytalk.info or contact PolyTalk staff for further information.

The language barrier faced by Illinois librarians is not unique to our state. Libraries in communities of all sizes around the country are challenged to provide meaningful service to non-English speaking patrons. We've had numerous inquiries from librarians in other states about the project and we are exploring opportunities for partnerships to expand PolyTalk beyond Illinois. Now that the initial investment in developing the PolyTalk volunteer network, database, and language kit is complete, we are currently developing plans to make PolyTalk self-

sustaining as an ongoing subscription service. Our vision is that PolyTalk will become a standard multi-type cooperative network service that all libraries can rely on when needed, just as we have come to rely on others for interlibrary loan and delivery to provide customer services we cannot provide ourselves.

To learn more about PolyTalk, please contact project coordinator Randi Weiss (217) 352-0047, ext. 229; project director Joe Sciacca, ext. 206; or LTLS executive director Jan Ison, ext. 221, e-mail polytalk@lincolntrail.info, or visit the PolyTalk Web site at www.polytalk.info.

It Pays to Visit the ASCLA Booth

The ASCLA Membership Promotion Committee sponsored a drawing at the ASCLA booth during the ALA Annual Conference in New Orleans. The prize was \$75 worth of free products from the ALA Graphics catalog. The lucky winner was Stella Cone, director of the Georgia Library for Accessible Services in Atlanta. Section representatives and volunteers from the Membership Promotion Committee staffed the booth during the conference and distributed information on the programs and services of the division.

Homer residents consider village purchase

By Tim Mitchell
News-Gazette

Homer residents are divided over the village board's decision to purchase a church and to convert it into a new municipal building, library, police station and community center.

Meanwhile, some orphans in Liberia are about to get a new home.

More than 110 people packed the former Victory Christian Center Monday night to express their views on the village's purchase of the church building.

The board voted a week ago to buy the 13,420-square-foot former church and the 8.14 acres on which it sits for \$600,000.

Mayor David Lucas announced that the village made the first \$25,000 down payment (which was placed in escrow) on Aug. 14 and

signed the contracts to buy the property on Monday morning.

Lucas said the village plans on closing on the sale by Jan. 31.

Homer resident Maurice Wienke said he thinks the village is spending too much money for the church building.

"I think moving everything out here takes away from the downtown," Wienke said. "This church building would be better used for a business that employs people, like a new nursing home."

"It's a huge waste of money," agreed resident Jodi Bear.

Christine Cunningham, meanwhile, said she thinks buying the church is a good idea.

"I think this is a progressive move for the town," Cunningham said.

Another resident, Pat Buttler, expressed concern about finding the money to remodel the church to serve village needs.

"Where is the money for the remodeling going to come from?" Buttler asked. "People here are going to put up for sale signs and move out of town."

James Williams said his family moved from Mahomet to Homer because they believe in the community. "I know there is a lot of sentimental value to the old building, but I see progress, and I see elected officials trying to do a very tough job."

Phil Mattis of Homer said the village board should have put the purchase of the

church on the ballot for voter approval.

"I can't understand why didn't the board put it on the ballot to see how the people felt," Mattis said.

"This is not a democracy; this is a representative republic," responded Lucas. "In the last election we had 200 votes cast. We are here on the board because we were elected to make these decisions on your behalf."

The church congregation has moved its services to Lincoln Square Village in Urbana.

Victory Christian Center Co-pastor Scot Gilmore said the

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church intends to use the money from the sale of the Homer church to pay for the construction of an orphanage in Monrovia, Liberia.

"It didn't make sense to have this place and have people around the world starving," Gilmore said. "The community, by purchasing the building, will help us provide for the future of orphans in Africa."

Homer resident Mary White said the sale of the church disrespects the people of Homer who built the Victory Christian Center.

"My son-in-law worked himself to death to build this," White said. "We dedicated this building to the Lord. Did anybody ask the Lord if it should be sold?"

"The Lord tells us: if you have two coats, bring your brother one," responded Gilmore.

Former Homer Mayor Dale Wolf said he supports the purchase of the Victory Christian Center property.

"I think you are making an excellent move," Wolf said. "Time will tell us that this was a good deal for the village."