

2013 National Medal Winner Video: Rancho Cucamonga Public Library

Narration: The National Medal for Museum and Library Services is the nation's highest honor for libraries and museums that are serving their communities in exceptional ways. Rancho Cucamonga Public Library Director, Robert Karatsu, and community member Christine DeVries traveled to Washington from Rancho Cucamonga, California to receive the national medal and spoke to IMLS about how the library impacts the community.

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Robert Karatsu: The Rancho Cucamonga Library is located in Rancho Cucamonga. It's in Southern California. It's about forty miles east of Los Angeles. // The library, itself, is relatively new, as well. It started around nineteen years ago. We were part of a county system. And then the city decided they would run the library as a municipal service. And because of that, it really gave us, I think, a lot of flexibility when we started creating the library, the programs, the services, as far as just looking to be, maybe, a little bit innovative, a little bit entrepreneurial, and just maybe doing things that a lot of traditional public libraries may not be doing.

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Christine Devries: The library means so much to me because I have spent a lot of time taking my children there since they were infants, the triplets. As soon as they were old enough to sit upright and sit a little semi-circle, we would go to the library, start reading them the picture books.

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Robert Karatsu: Obviously our first role and, I think, our first priority is to the people of Rancho Cucamonga and just to provide the services, and not just for the kids but for the adults. We have after school tutoring programs for some of the older kids. We have adult literacy programs. The cultural arts nights are for all families. We have a lot of programs that are targeted for seniors. We do, I think, ten computer classes a month.

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Christine Devries: They really, really love to go. They have their favorite authors and their favorite genres. And they like to go see if new books are being released. The library's really good about getting the new books in. So, as soon as they know a new book's getting released, they're at the library. Is it available? Is it available? And they're ready to check it out.

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Robert Karatsu: We did a needs assessment back in 2009, and the families like Christine and the moms were saying that they wanted to do things with the kids that would be hands-on, kind of interactive. But it's not like we had a museum space to do it. So, we basically created these interactive exhibits that are maybe the size of the table // they call them manipulatives, but they're basically toys that kids could

play, and they would be learning at the same time, kind of reinforcing hand-eye coordination and the small motor skills. And from that, we just-- we developed it for ourselves. And then we got another grant. And so, we were able to start loaning these play and learn islands to other libraries in the country, and now we're actually selling them, as well. So, it kind of created maybe a little cottage industry within our library. And it's become a self-sustaining program that we're able to do it.

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Christine Devries: We did a play and learn island trip to the library, which was neat for the kids to interact and learn about environmental resources.

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Christine Devries: As a home schooling mom, it means a lot to me because we can go to the library. The kids get to learn research skills and get to explore new things through the library and develop a love of reading, which is really important to me that they understand that reading and the library is really their access to the world and learning about all the places they're going to go to see as they grow up.

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Christine Devries: Well, a lot of the curriculum I have, it gives suggested reading materials to go along with it to kind of reinforce underlying facets of the curriculum. So, I can go to the library, and I can check out those books. And I can read them. And I can pick from them activities that will correlate to my curriculum.

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Robert Karatsu: You know I really can't say for a fact what came first the cart or the horse when it comes to the home school because we're a public library and everyone is welcome to come. And I guess at some point the home school moms realized that this is a nice asset and a good resource that can help them. And we're really glad that they are using us for that.

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Christine Devries: I can't imagine home schooling without the library, without the librarians, without the facilities that they have, without the activities that they have, the cultural nights that they do.

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Madison: One of the program things they do at Cultural History Night is they do like an Underground Railroad thing, and they have a guide. And the guide leads you around the bookcases, and there's people dressed up to look like helpers, or people who don't like slaves. Like the different sides. And they either will make you leave, or they'll let you in and be nice.

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Grant: I like going to the library and checking out books, and the library has some books that you can put on your Nook, which is pretty cool, because they have a lot of books.

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Kennedy: What I like most about going to the library, other than checking out books is the Star Wars Night, is when they have like librarians dressed up as Star Wars characters. Once they had R2D2 there. It was awesome!

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Robert Karatsu: Well, I think we've realized that, at least in our library, one size did not fit all. Everyone has a little bit-- they want something different. The home schoolers, the kids, the teens, the seniors, the adults, they're just all very different. And again we just have to keep our ears open and see what they want. And then we have to figure out how we are going to provide that to them. // So, that's the kind of direction that we're going in now. And our public has really responded to that.