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4/26/2010**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE****Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh Wins Two Statewide Awards**

Harrisburg, PA – The Pennsylvania Library Association (PaLA) has recognized Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh in Allegheny County with two **Best Practices in Early Learning Awards**.

Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh received an award for the production and distribution of *Reading Readiness Resources* and an award for *Penguin Fest!*

These programs were selected as “best practices” in the seventh annual Pennsylvania Library Association’s **Best Practices Awards for Programming and Services to Children under the Age of Six, Their Families and Caregivers**. *Reading Readiness Resources* was recognized in the category of “Early Learning and Parenting Programs for Adults” from among libraries across the state. *Penguin Fest!* was recognized in the category of “One Book, Every Young Child – 2009.”

This year, 21 awards were presented to 17 libraries at the Hilton in Harrisburg on Wednesday, April 14, at the *Pennsylvania Libraries: Learning Starts Here!* Early Learning Forum and Best Practices Luncheon. This statewide educational symposium was attended by several hundred librarians, advocates and policymakers. The Best Practices Award celebrates public library programs that are especially creative, innovative and effective in serving young children, their families and caregivers.

Reading Readiness Resources

Georgene DeFilippo is director of youth services for a city library that serves a regional population of nearly 1.3 million. She is always looking for ways to support programs that introduce and reinforce early literacy skills. DeFilippo said, “We have such a limited amount of time with parents and caregivers who attend programs in our libraries. The staff wanted to be able to distribute materials that would be easy and fun for families to use at home.”

With grant money from The Heinz Endowments, the Library published a series of attractive and practical printed pieces for staff to give away as part of their on-site and outreach programs.

DeFilippo said, “Our parents are determined to help their little ones learn to read because they remember how hard it was for them when they were in school.” The Library’s youth services department now offers: a four-color, 60-inch growth chart that lists appropriate skills from birth to 36 months, with room to “chart” favorite books; Mother Goose Rhyme Packets – two each for infants, toddlers and preschoolers – that reinforce nursery rhymes they hear at story time; and a series of cards suggesting activities that promote PA Early Learning Standards. The materials are distributed throughout the library system to caregivers who participate in literacy programs with young children. Librarians are pleased that they are able to give parents free materials that will help them work with their children at home, and they see the results. DeFilippo noted, “We really see a difference. We can tell that the parents are doing the activities with the children and learning the nursery rhymes because they are more engaged when they come to story time with the children. The giveaways have helped a lot.”

DeFilippo is pleased that the Best Practices Award provides an opportunity to share this approach to early literacy with other libraries. She said, “I felt so gratified when I heard that moms are tucking these handouts into purses and diaper bags and using them with their children on the bus or in the car. We’re doing some of our best work when we help parents help their kids become eager readers.”

Penguin Fest!

For several years, Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh has promoted *One Book Every Young Child*, in conjunction with the Month of the Young Child. Last year, organizers wanted to plan a special event that would attract new families with young children to the library.

“I loved the penguin theme,” said children’s librarian Caralee Sommerer at Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh – East Liberty. “And I really appreciated the manual that came with the book. It was filled with great ideas, especially in math and science.” For *Penguin Fest!*, Caralee recruited help from the Pittsburgh Association for the Education of Young Children, the Council of Three Rivers Indian Center, Pennsylvania Early Learning Keys to Equality, students from Pitt and Duquesne and volunteers from Kohl’s Department Store.

The two-hour, Saturday morning program offered a series of learning stations on the second floor of the library where children participated in memory games, crafts and a penguin egg relay. More than 120 people visited with the event’s most popular celebrity, Elvis the penguin, from the National Aviary. Pittsburgh Steelers Trai Essex and Darnell Stapleton volunteered their time to read to the children and sign autographs.

Sommerer is pleased that the Best Practices Award provides an opportunity to share this approach to early literacy with other libraries. She said, “Smaller libraries shouldn’t be afraid to contact large community organizations for help. And libraries should definitely give celebrities the opportunity to work with children. Trai Essex and Darnell Stapleton had a great time reading to the kids.”

The best-practices awards were presented by illustrator and author, Will and Jane Hillenbrand. Their book, *What a Treasure!*, is this year's selection for the **One Book, Every Young Child** initiative.

One Book, Every Young Child is a statewide literacy initiative, a collaborative project to promote the development of early literacy skills through interactive experiences with books and stories.

More than a half million Pennsylvania children ages three to six are reached annually through the **One Book, Every Young Child** program, which stresses the importance of reading early and often to young children and how that impacts their future lives.

For more information, go to www.paonebook.org.

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Photo caption: Author Jane Hillenbrand and illustrator Will Hillenbrand present a Pennsylvania Library Association Best Practices Award to Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh. (L to R) Caralee Sommerer (Children's Librarian at the East Liberty Library), Will Hillenbrand, Nancy Lewis (Creative Services Manager at Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh), Michelle Figlar (Executive Director, Pittsburgh Association for the Education of Young Children PAEYC), Georgene DeFilippo (Youth Services Coordinator, Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh), Jane Hillenbrand