

Athens, Georgia, Pinewoods Library

Athens' Pinewoods Center continues to win acclaim

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The Athens Regional Library System's (ARLS) Pinewoods Library and Community Learning Center is again making national headlines. Its latest accolade comes from the National Recreation and Park Association, which has awarded the center the 2008 Dorothy Mullen National Arts and Humanities Award for its "Bridging the Gap" program.

The award honors the most innovative and effective arts and humanities programs across the United States. The Lyndon House Arts Center in Athens nominated Pinewoods for the award.

"The Pinewoods library demonstrates the benefits of collaboration with community groups and involvement with the Hispanic community," said Kathryn Ames, director of ARLS. "Through a 25-person advisory committee and Pinewoods Mobile Home Park residents, the library system has been able to develop programs that respond to the needs of the community. These programs cover information such as personal finance, health education, English as a second language (ESL) and Plaza Comunitaria training. Pinewoods also offers after-school tutorial and family and parenting programs."

The Mullen Award is the center's second of the summer. Earlier, WebJunction selected Miguel Vicente, coordinator of Pinewoods, as winner of its Diversity Fair scholarship. He attended and spoke at the fair, which was part of the American Library Association's (ALA) Annual Conference in Anaheim, Calif., in June.

The scholarship covered Vicente's airfare, hotel, conference registration, meals and materials for his presentation. Vicente discussed the efforts made by ARLS to design and open the Pinewoods center and the system's many accomplishments in meeting the needs of the area's Spanish-speaking population.

One month earlier, the National Institute for Adult Education in Mexico invited Vicente to attend the first meeting for Plaza Comunitaria Representatives in the United States. Plaza Comunitaria is a distance education program sponsored by the Mexican government that enables Mexican-born patrons to improve their literacy skills, earn high school diplomas and receive vocational training.

This event took place in Chicago and was attended by the minister of foreign relations of Mexico, Ambassador Patricia Espinosa Cantellano, and the minister of education, Josefina Vazquez Mota. The gathering allowed Plaza Comunitaria coordinators to share experiences and best practices in order to benefit newly formed Plazas.

Earlier this year, ARLS received a competitive grant of \$14,000 from the Institute for Mexicans Living Abroad to support its Plaza Comunitaria and related educational programs.

ARLS also was the only library in Georgia selected to receive one of 34 grants from ALA and the Dollar General Foundation called "American Dreams Begin @ Your Library." The purpose of these grants is to improve current or develop additional ESL classes for new immigrants. "In our case," Ames said, "we will

use it to develop a training program for our volunteer ESL instructors and to develop an online training manual."