

**Thursday, June 4, 2009**

**Toronto Public Library and Urban Libraries Council.**

**Dear Members of the Board,**

I am pleased to provide you with an update on Toronto Public Library's (TPL) participation in Urban Libraries Council (ULC) and the benefits of ULC membership.

Over the past three years I have been TPL's representative on the Urban Libraries Council - Executive Board and Urban Youth Strategies Working Group. The Board is a unique coming together of a diverse group of library professionals, trustees, community development professionals, city planners, architects, university professors and accountants. The Council is a Chicago-based membership association of over 190 large urban public libraries and related corporations and organizations. The members, TPL included, represent a base of over ninety million residents living in the largest cities and metropolitan counties in North America. ULC is an organization that addresses the concerns of urban communities by building networks, strengthening members, and by strengthening communities through research and dialogue. With a collective effort we, as a library community, can effectively reach our goals and objectives.

Strengthening the role of public libraries as an essential and vital part of urban life is paramount in the work ULC does. Coupled with benchmarking data from leading urban and metropolitan libraries, ULC is able to promote the value of urban public libraries in local communities.

By developing creative and unique ways of engaging hard-to-reach communities or by the "pride and resilience, adaptability, and flexibility of member libraries", ULC uses new technology and sensitivity to changing demographics; moreover, by adding value to the library community as an active community partner, and by promoting programs and collections that mirror the linguistic and cultural needs of communities.

I have often said libraries are the new meeting places; they are the neutral points in the community – the ultimate equalizers. This very statement, also evident in TPL's new strategic plan, highlights the ULC adage: "Libraries make neighbourhoods feel safer and enrich downtown development, and branch libraries are essential elements of neighbourhood development". A number of TPL's strategic directions are very much in line with ULC, and often complement the work TPL has been doing as a leader among libraries across North America. ULC and its 190 members, make it possible for TPL to exchange, imagine, grow, and innovate faster.

In 2008, I had the pleasure of participating in ULC Foresight 2020 ([www.ulc2020.org](http://www.ulc2020.org)), a three-day conference on critically looking at scenarios that involved a 'world without libraries'. A wide range of participants from across organizations were invited to engage staff and peers in futures thinking and scenario planning. The results are fascinating. We explored the possibility of challenging economic times to the emergence of Spanish as the language of trade and commerce.

ULC is the leader in developing and advocating for:

- an Urban Libraries agenda;
- library resources and tools;
- discussion among members, public and private intuitions;
- outcomes measurement and research;
- promotion of local programs and initiatives that address socio-economic challenges;
- research publications:  
*Welcome Stranger: Public Libraries Build the Global Village,*  
*Making Cities Stronger: Public Library Contributions to Economic Development,*  
*The Engaged Library: Chicago Stories of Community Building.*

ULC Member benefits include:

- research;
- professional development;
- conferences;
- networking;
- ULC newsletter: The Exchange;
- access to American libraries;
- [www.urbanlibraries.org](http://www.urbanlibraries.org);
- [www.ulc2020.org](http://www.ulc2020.org).

It has been my pleasure to represent the TPL Board on ULC, and I look forward to continuing to be a part of an innovative and imaginative organization. If you have any questions or would like to learn more about ULC, please feel free to contact me at [olawrence416@gmail.com](mailto:olawrence416@gmail.com)

Sincerely,

Okeima R. Lawrence  
Toronto Public Library Board Member