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## Iowans Get Their Geek On

Public libraries take part in 'Geek the Library' campaign to raise awareness about the importance of library funding support

**DES MOINES, Iowa** – June 22, 2009 – Iowans in Dallas, Polk, Story and Warren counties may soon add a new verb to their vocabulary—geek.

Many central Iowa public libraries are participating in 'Geek the Library,' a community-based public awareness campaign launching this week. The campaign highlights what people are passionate about and how libraries can support them, in an effort to heighten awareness about the critical funding issues public libraries face.

'Geek the Library' features local advertising that introduces 'geek' as a verb, and encourages the public to talk about what they 'geek'—whether it's engineering, superheroes or art. The public awareness campaign illustrates the fact that everyone is passionate about something—everyone 'geeks' something—and that the library supports them all.

"This campaign is designed to provoke conversation about the vital role that public libraries and librarians play in today's challenging environment," said Cathy De Rosa, global vice president of marketing for OCLC, a nonprofit library cooperative heading campaign development and implementation. "We hope it will spark important community discussions about how public libraries can remain strong throughout central Iowa, and ultimately across the country."

The awareness campaign, which is funded by a grant from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, features print and radio advertising, social networking elements, a Web site and grassroots community initiatives to draw attention to the need for increased library support. The campaign Web site, [www.geekthelibrary.org](http://www.geekthelibrary.org), provides information about how people can get active and support their local library.

As the economic downturn continues, millions of Americans are turning to local libraries for educational opportunities, job-searching resources and entertainment. The increased demand for library services is taking a toll on libraries already experiencing flat or decreasing budgets. And state and local cuts are impacting public library hours, programs and staffing, forcing some libraries to close indefinitely.

While most people have visited their public library and understand its important role in their community, many do not know that libraries are at risk or that local funding for libraries is heavily influenced by community members. In Iowa, the majority of library funding comes from local tax dollars. City funding per capita varies widely across the state from about \$17 to more than \$65 per year. But the average city per capita funding level is about \$30—less than the cost of a dinner out for most families.<sup>1</sup>

"Libraries are working harder than ever to provide the services their communities need—but resources are strained," said Mary Wegner, state librarian of Iowa. "Public libraries in Iowa and across the country play a vital role in transforming people's lives and building community, and we're excited about helping Iowans better understand the challenges of library funding and how every individual is part of the equation."

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<sup>1</sup> Source: State Library of Iowa

Working with local library leaders, OCLC is piloting the public awareness campaign in parts of Georgia and in central Iowa. A small number of additional libraries and library systems will also participate later this summer. The pilot campaign efforts will run through December 2009. In 2010, OCLC will make the campaign materials and other guides, along with information from the pilot campaigns, available to library leaders throughout the country to assist them in their efforts to strengthen local support for libraries.

The public awareness campaign hopes to start a conversation about library funding to inspire more people to take personal responsibility for keeping their local public libraries vital in their communities. The campaign will not support or oppose any candidate for public office, nor attempt to influence legislation.

### **About OCLC**

Founded in 1967 and headquartered in Dublin, Ohio, OCLC is a nonprofit library service and research organization that has provided computer-based cataloging, reference, resource sharing, eContent, preservation, library management and Web services to 71,000 libraries in 112 countries and territories. OCLC and its member libraries worldwide have created and maintain WorldCat, the world's richest online resource for finding library materials. Search WorldCat.org on the Web at [www.worldcat.org](http://www.worldcat.org). For more information, visit [www.oclc.org](http://www.oclc.org).

### **About Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation**

Guided by the belief that every life has equal value, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation works to help all people lead healthy, productive lives. In developing countries, it focuses on improving people's health and giving them the chance to lift themselves out of hunger and extreme poverty. In the United States, it seeks to ensure that all people—especially those with the fewest resources—have access to the opportunities they need to succeed in school and life. Based in Seattle, Washington, the foundation is led by CEO Jeff Raikes and Co-chair William H. Gates, Sr., under the direction of Bill and Melinda Gates and Warren Buffett. Learn more at [www.gatesfoundation.org](http://www.gatesfoundation.org).

The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation began investing in computer and Internet services in U.S. public libraries in 1997. To date, it has provided \$350 million in grants and other support to install and sustain computers in libraries and train thousands of library staff in nearly 13,000 libraries in all 50 states and U.S. territories. In recent years, the foundation has also supported advocacy training and awareness efforts that will help libraries sustain high-quality online access for patrons in partnership with their communities.

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