

I Love My
Librarian!

Nomination for Beatriz Adriana Guevara

Charlotte Mecklenburg Library
Charlotte, North Carolina

NOMINATOR

Clarissa Garcia

1. Please tell us in 2-3 sentences why your nominee should win this award. What sets him/her apart?

Beatriz became an “official” librarian in August 2011, but has been a librarian at heart ever since a bilingual librarian changed her life by helping her learn English through books when she was young. Since that moment, she has loved reading and has worked in libraries for about 9 years, promoting reading and life-long learning. I have not met anyone else who works harder than she does at taking the library out of four walls and into the community that needs it. She is passionate about serving minorities, especially the Latino population in Charlotte, and through her efforts, the library is much more visible and accessible to people that were not even aware it existed. Beatriz advocates for equality in the services and programs available to everyone, and is a fantastic role model for me, as well as to everyone who has the privilege of meeting her. She deserves to win this award because she has a unique approach that exceeds the expectations of the people she serves by improving their lives through knowledge and practical skills. Winning this award will be a small way we can say “thank you” or rather, “gracias” for everything she has done for us!

2. Please list a few ways in which the nominee has helped you and made your experience of the library a positive one. For instance, did the nominee inspire in you a love for literature; assist you in a project or finding other information?

Through one of the workshops that Beatriz offered at the library, I learned the steps I needed to take to apply to college. Beatriz helped me complete my FAFSA and SAT

applications and gave me advice on starting the process and on my career (I provide additional details in response to Question 4 below). I am now enrolled in college, receiving financial aid, and on my way to becoming a paralegal. I am very appreciative of her time and assistance and in fact, she changed my perception of what a librarian looks like and what they do. When she was helping me with the application process, I remember I looked at her and told her “You don’t look like a librarian.” She laughed, and what I meant was that she seemed too young, professional, patient, and helpful in contrast to the picture I had of the librarians I have met over the years. She is an amazing role model for the youth of Charlotte, especially the Latino youth because she is one of us. I know I can count on her whenever I need help, which I’m sure will be soon now that I’m in college. I couldn’t have done it without her, and there are many others who feel the same, such as another teenager who attended the same workshop I did at the library. She had graduated from high school two years ago and had been working odd jobs and trying to save money to help her family. When she was in high school, she didn’t even consider attending a university because she believed it was too expensive. However, after attending Beatriz’s workshop, she signed up to take the SAT and requested information from different universities. The last time I spoke with her and her parents, they had tears in their eyes because she will be attending Johnson C. Smith University in the fall with a \$12,000 scholarship! Beatriz also provided her with an opportunity to volunteer at the library (I provide additional details in response to Question 5 below).

In the Hispanic culture, it’s customary to give gifts to someone you value and admire. Spanish-speaking patrons are often very humble, but they are very thankful for Beatriz’s help and will bring her small gifts to show their gratitude. A man had participated in the Spanish computer course taught by Beatriz. After four weeks, he had mastered the mouse, the keyboard and other functions, and was able to access and search the Internet on his own. One day to thank her for helping him improve his computer skills, he brought her two watermelons from his own garden! Another patron tried to pay her for her assistance and when Beatriz explained that librarians are there to help, he said, “So I really don’t have to pay? No one’s ever helped me for free! Thank you so much for helping me and being so patient with me. I will continue to visit the library and take some computer classes so I can learn even more. You are a great blessing.” Another lady said to her, “You know, I first heard about you and the library on the radio. I really liked what you said about you being committed to helping people and I almost called you, but then I remembered that so many people and agencies promise the same thing and never deliver. It wasn’t until months later that I met you at the health fair and realized that you were very humble and kind, and I decided to call you. Now I know why libraries are so important to people: because of people like you who really act on what they say. I’m sorry, but you’ll be getting a lot more calls because I told my friends about you and they want to get their library cards and begin checking out books like the ones I’ve borrowed! Thank you so much!” A patron started bringing her two-year-old to the Spanish story time offered by Beatriz after seeing it advertised in a newspaper. Since then, she talked to Beatriz about her future goal of becoming a bilingual receptionist and obtaining her GED. Beatriz taught her to use the library’s online resources and to check out books. She recently began preparing for the GED, has inquired about taking classes

at a local community college, and is now looking for job postings to learn more about the qualifications she needs. She said “My dream has been dormant for so many years because I felt I didn’t have the skills I needed to accomplish it. Meeting Beatriz has been a blessing and through her help, I know I can achieve my goals and show my children that they can do anything they set their minds to. I have no words to thank her!”

3. How has the librarian made a difference in the community? Please be specific.

Beatriz is truly the people’s librarian! She advocates for the Latino community more than any other person I have met before. Whenever the library offers programs, Beatriz goes out in the community to let people know about them. For example, when she offered the College Planning and Career Informational workshops at the library, she visited several local high schools to address students and teachers. She also spoke with teenagers and parents at various churches, and posted flyers in different grocery stores in the area. In addition, she published the information in the four major Spanish-language newspapers in Charlotte and even did two radio interviews, inviting parents and teens to the event. Her time and dedication paid off, since over 120 people benefitted from the workshops! Beatriz maintains a close relationship with the local Spanish newspapers and radio stations, keeping them updated about library programs, and more importantly, keeping the library in the spotlight where people can see its importance. She also takes programs, services, and books out in the community. She partnered with two Central Piedmont Community College ESL classes to offer presentations to the students about library services and register them for library cards. She also engaged these classes at the library by inviting them to take a tour and participate in a library scavenger hunt, where they had an opportunity to meet and interact with other library staff. Since the classes were offered at local elementary schools and all the students were parents of young children, Beatriz offered a four-week Family Literacy Workshop to teach parents the five early literacy practices from the Every Child Ready to Read Curriculum. She provided in-class and take-home activities for the families (after modeling these techniques during the workshop) and gave each family free books to ensure that they were all reading at home. She also offered the workshop at the library to families who attend her story time in Spanish.

Beatriz has dedicated herself to representing the Latino community in the Charlotte Mecklenburg Library system. She recently obtained approval from the Library Director to form the Latino Services Team, whose goal is to provide enhanced programs and services for the Spanish-speaking community of Charlotte and Mecklenburg County and expand these services to additional libraries across the county. Beatriz believes that through system-wide communication and partnerships, along with an increased volunteer participation, quality, culturally-relevant programs and events will be offered to Spanish-speaking patrons of all ages through the work of this Team. One of the very first tasks Beatriz, with assistance from members of the Team, assumed was to establish a phone line where Spanish-speaking patrons could call to receive information about the library, and ask questions. Until this point, patrons visiting a library branch with no Spanish-speaking staff had to wait until an interpreter was found (either in person or by phone) and when this was not possible, had to leave empty-handed. Beatriz worked with the

library's Communication Department to create a bookmark in Spanish describing library programs and services available at the library, along with the new system-wide phone number patrons can call for more information in Spanish. This bookmark is professionally printed and will be available at all 20 library branches in Mecklenburg County, and will also be used in outreach events. Additionally, the Team is working with volunteers to expand the number of computer classes and tutoring sessions being offered in Spanish, and educating library staff in working with the Latino community. Beatriz created a webpage on their staff intranet to share information and resources with library staff, and has developed a plan with other team members to present this information at managers, librarians, and children's staff meetings.

Beatriz is also the co-lead of another team at the library called the Reaching Diverse Audiences Team, which provides children programs and resources for patrons of various cultures and disabilities. Beatriz is invited to many community events such as festivals, health fairs, church functions, etc., to share information about the library, stories and books, and simply to bring the library to people who need it the most. She is a positive role model, and the Latino community is proud to have her represent them. Children recognize her from attending story times with her at various places in Charlotte and will beg their parents for the opportunity to talk with her. Recently, a four-year-old child saw Beatriz at a local store and started singing the opening song for story time! Her mom cried because she has been concerned about her daughter since she does not talk or express herself frequently. She said that since they started attending the Spanish story time at the library, her daughter has shown a greater interest for books and is curious about the world around her! Beatriz is well-known and loved by all in the community!

4. How has the library, and the nominee, improved the quality of your life?

At the insistence of my mother, I attended the College Planning and Career Informational workshop that Beatriz was offering at the library. She had noticed one of the flyers that Beatriz put up in our church and I agree to attend since other youth were attending. I didn't know what to expect since most of these workshops are usually long and boring, but I instantly realized that this one would be different. Beatriz warmly greeted all of us and immediately introduced the speakers. She had partnered with local organizations, colleges, and universities who spoke to us about the process of applying for college and then offered resources to help us with the applications, resumes, essays, etc. What I remember the most was the college students who shared their experience and made me feel that I could also accomplish my goals, and Beatriz's assurance that she was there to help us with the process. I overheard one of the families say, "We've been to similar events in the past, but today was the first time my daughter was engaged and asking questions! She was excited and said to me, 'Mom, this is the first time I really felt I've received the information that I need to get into a college!' Thank you all so much for your hard work and for caring about people like us. You gave us all hope for a better future." That was exactly how I felt! The next day, I called Beatriz and she immediately set up an appointment for us to meet with her at the library. She helped me fill out the FAFSA application (which I had been intimidated by before), register for the SAT, and

gave me advice on different career options. Because of her help, I received financial aid, have started classes at a local college, and I'm on my way to becoming a paralegal!

Beatriz also began offering the Computer Basics Course in Spanish at the library in September 2011. Since then, over 350 patrons have participated in the course, learning valuable skills such as typing, writing resumes, searching for and applying to jobs online, and creating email accounts to communicate with their children's teachers. She has helped various patrons fill out job applications (all of them are now employed), create business cards and webpages for their businesses, and set up Skype accounts to communicate with their relatives in their native countries. One of the ways the library meets patrons' needs is through its Technology Tutoring program, which Beatriz coordinates, interviewing and training potential tutors, and maintaining their schedules. She also provides resources and handouts for the tutors and patrons, and calls patrons to remind them of their tutoring appointments. She is currently working to recruit Spanish-speaking tutors to expand this program to other libraries. As of August 2012, about 75 patrons have benefitted from the program, with everything from writing resumes to learning how to use electronic devices such as Kindles and iPads.

Even though she is an Adult Services Librarian, Beatriz understands the importance of early literacy and stresses that the foundation for life-long learning begins at home. For this reason, since 2011, she has offered one of the few Spanish-language story times in the Charlotte Mecklenburg Library system. Through stories, songs, activities and crafts, she encourages children and parents to learn through playing so that children ages 0-5 will be prepared for school and will love reading. In only one year, over 500 children and over 360 parents have been impacted by the program and have learned early literacy skills that will help them succeed in life. Many of the children have started preschool but continue to attend story time over the summer or during holidays. They all regularly visit the library to check out books or simply to talk about their school experiences. Beatriz has offered a Family Literacy Workshop for Spanish-speakers, both at the library and at an elementary school. Over 110 parents and 130 children have participated at the library and 49 children and 65 adults at the elementary school. All of the participants received information about the five early literacy practices from the Every Child Ready to Read Curriculum and enjoyed early literacy activities that prepared their children to be ready to read. They were also able to take home activities and books to practice these skills at home. One of the mothers attending the workshop said to Beatriz, "I don't understand why I have to teach these things to my child. Isn't it his teacher's job to do this?" Beatriz patiently explained the many benefits of reading at home, and how it could be easy and fun for the whole family. Now, the mom visits the library at least once per week to check out books on all subjects for the entire family!

5. How does the nominee make the library a better place?

Beatriz makes the library a welcoming and friendly place, especially for people who are not frequent library users. Minorities and teenagers are often hesitant (sometimes even afraid!) to walk into a library and seek help because they're afraid to ask the wrong questions or they don't want to take up the librarians' time. Beatriz's involvement with

the community helps her understand our needs and develop programs and services that educate and improve the lives of many generations. She meets many of the patrons who visit the library outside of the library, at community events such as health fairs, or through the phone when people call to inquire about a newspaper article. During the summer, Beatriz promoted the Summer Reading program and encouraged all Latino patrons to register. One of the patrons had given up on reading since dropping out of school when he was in sixth grade at a public school in Mexico. He read what was required of him at work but left the responsibilities of reading with their children to his wife, and he definitely did not read for pleasure. When Beatriz mentioned the Summer Reading program, he was hesitant to register because he said he wasn't interested in reading. After asking about his preferences, Beatriz discovered that he had did have an interest in the books by a certain Mexican author. He was very excited to find other books by the same author in the library's collection and immediately signed up for a library card and checked them out. He is now reading a fourth book by the same author and he is excited about reading! He completed the Summer Reading program and has participated in the story times in Spanish and other programs with his family. One of the reasons the patron was able to find the books he needed was because Beatriz has improved the look and the number of Spanish-language materials available in the library. She has worked diligently to produce better signs, discard old and stained books and present books in eye-catching displays. Because of her efforts, the library where she works has had the highest circulation of Spanish-language materials in the Charlotte Mecklenburg Library system, with a total of 3,674 items circulated from 2011 to 2012. In fact, in July 2011 only 169 items had been circulated as opposed to 591 during the month of June 2012.

Beatriz also makes the library a better place to volunteer! She not only coordinates the Technology Tutoring program, but also the Amigos Tutoring program, which pairs high school students with elementary school students to receive homework assistance. She provides an orientation, training and resources for the tutors and, works with the families to schedule times for tutoring. Additionally, Beatriz encourages high school students who need community service credit hours or volunteer credits to help out at the library shelving, answering questions, or working on special projects. She recently partnered with the University of North Carolina at Charlotte's Service Learning in the Hispanic Community Program. The goal of this program is to match Spanish majors with local agencies to become volunteers, practice their Spanish, and learn more about working with Spanish-speakers. Beatriz will train the volunteers and assign them to specific departments or libraries so they can develop their language and other skills. By doing so, she is also expanding the services and programs the library offers to Spanish speakers while preparing the leaders of tomorrow.

Besides being an educational site, Beatriz also makes the library a fun, creative, and cultural destination! In April, the library celebrated Día de los niños/Día de los libros (Children's Day/Book Day) and Beatriz developed a program to be presented at the apartment complex right across the street from the library. A total of 55 children and 25 parents attended, many of whom were residents at the apartments. Participants were delighted by the play and music presented, as well as by having the opportunity to take

pictures with Clifford, the Big Red Dog (played by a teen volunteer). Over the summer, Beatriz worked with another volunteer to offer a “Creating with Books” program for families with a focus on books and resources about piñatas. All 65 children and 42 adults who attended were able to create a take-home “mini-piñata” with boxes collected from various library branches. In December, Beatriz and the library’s Outreach department (with assistance from volunteers), hosted a play based on the popular Mexican comedy show “El Chavo del 8” (The Boy from [apartment] 8). There were between 150-200 people in attendance, and all participated in crafts and literacy activities. These are only some of the ways that Beatriz makes the library an awesome place for people ages 0 to 100 and up! She definitely deserves to be recognized for her efforts in serving the underserved populations of Charlotte!