

Global Libraries Romania

MONTHLY NEWSLETTER

October 2008

Residents in Scanteia Overcome Challenges to Launch New Public Access Computing Facilities at Library

On September 7, residents of Scanteia in Iasi County gathered together at the public library to officially welcome their new Public Access Computing (PAC) resources. The event brought together a diverse group of citizens who listened as speakers explained the new opportunities available through the facilities.

The Scanteia library PAC is one of 13 pilot sites IREX has developed with community involvement over the last year. However, the effort to create these resources in Scanteia did not come without challenges. When IREX representatives first visited Scanteia in February 2008 to discuss the prospect of including the library in the program, Mayor Fanica Sacaleanu was enthusiastic, but concerned by the library's urgent need of remodeling and rehabilitation. Likewise, he was not sure the community could obtain broadband access in a reasonable time. "We heard promises upon promises that the internet connection would come, but nothing was actually done," he said.

To make sure that communities are prepared to sustainably run a PAC for the long-term, IREX has required that local governments commit to provide broadband access. However, delays in the installation process in Scanteia kept the facilities from opening sooner. The local ISP was reluctant to establish a connection for the rural community. After continued delays, the community was finally able to obtain wireless broadband access through the provider Vodafone.

Meanwhile, the library building received renovations including a new heating system, floors, windows, and freshly painted walls. Finally, a subscription for Internet access from a Romanian mobile service provider meant that the library was prepared to host a new PAC.

Librarian Lenuta Baltag told IREX representatives that the investment in the library made by the community is an important incentive for her to assist library visitors. "We have a good building now with



The Scanteia library, pictured above, received renovations with funds from the local government. Below, the library welcomes visitors after the renovations.



computers and internet access, and I have already started to plan for the future. I'm changing my schedule in order to accommodate those who want to talk to their relatives abroad, so Sunday will be a busy day for me from now on."

Foremost among the pilot sites IREX has been working with over the past year, Scanteia has proven the value of community members mobilizing to achieve their goals. Mayor Sacaleanu summed up this effort: "We are a small community, with scarce resources. We can't afford to miss opportunities." ■

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Librarian Valentin Smedescu Reflects on Romania's Librarians and the Future of the Global Libraries Program

As a recent participant in one of IREX's Training of Trainers (TOT) courses for library service development and a former Community Participation Contest (CPC) applicant, Valentin Smedescu has a special interest in the needs and opportunities confronting Romania's library system. Valentin has been working at the Valcea County Library since 2002 as Director of Marketing and Development, where his job includes coordinating commune libraries, organizing professional training courses for librarians, and acting as a liaison between the County Council and the local government. He also serves as editor-in-chief of "Biblioteca Valceana." Apart from his official work as a librarian, Valentin also serves as an editorial manager for several local media outlets including "Ramnic Courier" and hosts a daily show on a local TV station.

IREX staff members Alexandra Bucur and Monica Grecu recently talked with Smedescu about the impact of library service course on him, his experience as a past CPC applicant, and his hopes for continuing education for Romanian librarians and the future of opportunities available through the Global Librarians initiative.

Why did you apply for the TOT Library Service Development course?

When I first read the request for applications, I thought this would be a perfect opportunity to gain some more structured knowledge that would be helpful in my work developing library services in Valcea County. On a smaller scale, I had already started to organize library service courses with Valcea librarians in 2007. I was ready for this opportunity.

What did you gain from this course and how are you planning to use these new skills?

I acquired many new things in this course, but what I truly gained is a methodical, well-structured and synthetic teaching style. This course also confirmed some of my previous thoughts about the direction in which library ser-

vices should develop, though these thoughts were really only the tip of the iceberg.

I am already using what I learned in the TOT and will continue to do so: some of the other librarians in Valcea County expressed their interest in what we learned from Hermina Anghelescu at the Training of Trainers Course. With her approval, I posted her presentations on the the Valcea libraries e-learning website at www.bibliotecivalcene.ro. My plans for 2009 include training sessions starting with the materials we covered at the TOT in 5 library methodology cen-

"I am already using what I learned in the TOT and will continue to do so ... My plans for 2009 include training sessions starting with the materials we covered at the TOT in 5 library methodology centers in Valcea County, irrespective of the county's choice for the first round of the Global Libraries Romania national program."

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You applied for the first round of the Community Participation Contest, but did not win. Why did you want to create this web portal for Valcea libraries?

I wanted to develop this website because I thought it would be the most efficient tool to deliver information about libraries, librarians, cultural heritage, and events as well as provide librarians and other users with access to electronic

information. Eventually, we were able to launch the website on September 26 with funding from the county library.

What lessons did you learn from the CPC application process?

The application taught me that my project was not quite as innovative as I thought. Even when the project was not selected, I wanted to make it a reality through my own work to see if would meet my expectations. If this project proves to be good and useful for other libraries as well, that will be even better.

How do you think local governments can be encouraged to invest in librarian training?

This issue starts with library training. If county library representatives learn how to advocate for their cause, they can persuade local officials to invest in training courses for librarians. Librarians need to be prepared to think creatively to pursue their goals. In any case, I think governments will be encouraged to participate if the training is provided at no cost.

What are your expectations for the Global Librarians national program in Romania?

Frankly, I have high expectations. I think library methodologists should be involved from the very start, because they know what to expect, how important the program is and what must be done in order for it to succeed at the local level. Of course, there will also be challenges with some librarians who don't fully understand the range of possibilities available through a modern library system. Above all, I think it is our duty to convey to local governments and other stakeholders of the importance of modern library services. ■

Past CPC Winner Turns Project Plans Into Reality in Sălaj

After years of neglect, the Sălaj County Hospital library was opened to the public on September 29. The opening was timed to coincide with the Hospital's 30 year anniversary.

The new hospital library project was July's winning Community Participation Contest (CPC) applicant. The award allowed a consortium of local organizations to rehabilitate the library, increase its collection with over 1,000 volumes from the County Library, and equip it with new electronic resources. The hospital library now offers two computers with internet connections and will function as a branch of the Sălaj County Library and as an information center for the hospital staff, patients, and the general public.

Before the project, the hospital library housed books primarily focused

on medical issues and was available exclusively for hospital staff members. According to Florica Pop, Director of the County Library, "This library was a dream of ours. We now hope that those who spend time in the hospital and are somewhat isolated can access information here." With the new changes, patients and other users will have better access to health information and other relevant content—both through the additional books and through the two computers offering internet connections.

Coinciding with the library's reopening, the thirty year anniversary also provided an opportunity to launch the hospital's new website at <http://www.spitalzalau.ro/>. ■

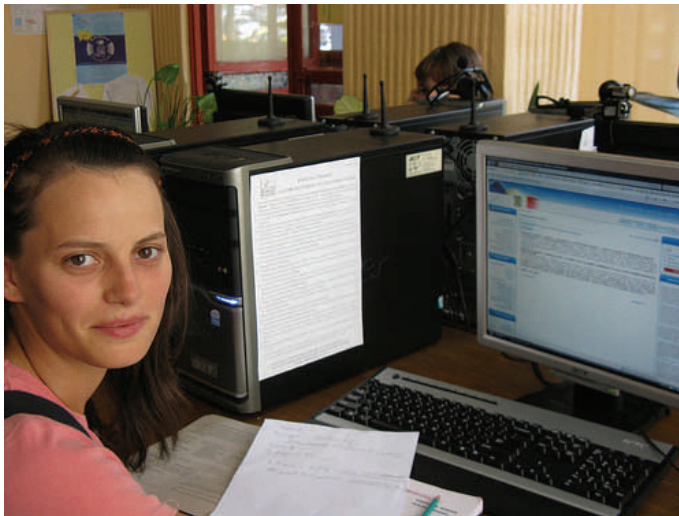
"This library was a dream of ours. We now hope that those who spend time in the hospital and are somewhat isolated can access information here."

Florica Pop, County Library Director

Local Communities Come Together to Celebrate New PACs

Residents of Iasi celebrated the opening of four new Public Access Computer (PAC) facilities throughout the city on September 5, while in Scanteia and Belcesti, new PACs were opened two days later with new equipment and rehabilitated facilities.

In Iasi, IREX worked with the County Library to supply 16 computers divided between four different PACs. As a part of a cost share agreement, the County Library also agreed to supply three additional computers for the PAC housed in the Palace of Culture. The three additional PACs are located in branch libraries across the city. County Library Director Professor Catalin Bordeianu, who spoke at the opening event underscored how "these



A student in Iasi searches for information on scholarships at a new PAC at the M. Sadoveanu County Library branch.

resources represent part of the new services created in our library ...and we, as the county library, have the role of being the local resource as trainers for the county." During the ceremony, a video link was established with the

"These computers came in a week ago and we have already started promoting our new services to the community. Everybody who comes in for a book can sit down and start searching the net. I even have requests for computer use guidance, from people who have computers at home but don't know how to use them."

-Librarian Ramona Teodorescu

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IREX is an international nonprofit organization providing leadership and innovative programs to improve the quality of education, strengthen independent media, and foster pluralistic civil society development. Founded in 1968, IREX works in more than 50 countries.

Roma Inclusion Project Wins August CPC Award

The “Education Program for Roma Citizens” (EDUCERO) project has been selected as the August CPC winner. The EDUCERO project aims to reduce the Roma community’s social marginalization in Săcele by working with members of the Roma community to increase their knowledge and understanding of their civic rights and responsibilities.

Proposed by the Municipal Library in Săcele and the County Library in Braşov, the EDUCERO project will create an information kit specifically designed for the Roma community’s needs. The kit will explain the basic rights of all Romanian citizens by emphasizing the right to citizenship, the importance of having official identity papers, and the legal rights of ethnic minorities living in Romania. Additional resources will also provide information on finding a job, including creating resumes, and the interview process.

The libraries intend to train 8 Roma individuals in IT skills, who will then become IT trainers for other members of the Roma community by providing assistance in accessing local library resources. The IT component aims to create an informal educational system specifically designed to address the learning needs of Roma adults. As Brasov County Librarian Claudia Popescu explains, “this project will contribute to the social development of the community by changing the



At the Săcele library, residents seek to include their Roma neighbors through civic education and IT training.

way Roma are perceived by local authorities, and the entire community. Roma citizens will also change their own self-perception by increasing their capacity, self-esteem, and trust in the local authorities.

“Over the past year, IREX has been working with communities through the monthly CPC contest to develop innovative local initiatives that leverage library technology resources. These awards encourage communities to think creatively about the ways in which technologies can best serve their needs and become modals for other communities across Romania. ■

Communities Celebrate New PACs

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Salaj County Library, and colleagues and local media, newspapers and TV reported on the event.

In addition to the PACs in Iasi, communities in Scanteia and Belcesti also worked together to make their new facilities a reality. In Scanteia for example, the local government invested nearly \$7,000 to renovate and prepare the city library. The wiring and heating systems were replaced, as were the floors and windows. The facilities in Scanteia will also provide an opportunity to leverage existing projects in the community. For example, the library plans to share resources and coordinate program activities with World Vision, an international development NGO currently working to help local farmers develop useful IT skills.

Librarian Ramona Teodorescu ex-

pressed excitement over the new PACs. “These computers came in a week ago and we have already started promoting our new services to the community. Everybody who comes in for a book can sit down and start searching the net. I even have requests for computer use guidance, from people who have computers at home but don’t know how to use them.”

These new PACs are part of the 13 pilot sites IREX has funded over the last year in order to create a foundation for a national library development program. IREX has been working with these communities to develop internet facilities inside of libraries in order to learn best practices and gain experience. The lessons learned from these projects are now being used to inform the national Global Libraries program. ■