



THE
PUBLIC
LIBRARY
of Cincinnati
and
Hamilton County

150
1853-2003

PRESS RELEASE

For Immediate Release

800 Vine Street
Cincinnati, Ohio
45202-2071

Richard L. Helmes
Phone•513•369•6959
Fax•513•369•4565
rick.helmes@cincinnati.library.org
or
Phyllis Hegner
Phone•513•369•4571
Fax•513•369•4565

April 16, 2003

Mary E. Finley Essay and Speech Contest at West End Branch Great Success

The 2nd Annual *Mary E. Finley Memorial Essay and Speech Contest*, held recently at the West End Branch Library, brought great accolades. Ten teens took the challenge to write essays on the topic “What the Library Means to Me.” Each arrived at the West End Branch to read their essay to a supportive group of over 40 people, and talked about the wonders of the Library, the great staff they deal with regularly, and the wonderful treasures available to them for free!

The contest, a dream child of retired librarian George Ferguson, originated as an honor to the late Mary E. Finley, a librarian who had influenced George as a youngster growing up in the West End. Mrs. Finley, one of the first African-American librarians hired by the Public Library of Cincinnati and Hamilton County, retired in 1972 with 44 years of service, most of which was spent as a Branch Librarian/Manager in various branches in the West End. She strongly encouraged black citizens to learn to use the library and to make certain their children became avid readers. George became a librarian in large part because of the strong encouragement he received from Mrs. Finley, who he refers to as “a most remarkable lady.”

No contest is complete without an incentive. George supplied the prize money (\$50) for the first contest (2002), and received an additional \$50 this year from an anonymous donor. He hopes it will continue to build as interest in the contest blossoms. Contestants put a great deal of heart in their essays—it was obvious that each regularly visits the Library to do homework, attend programs, or “just hang out.”

The judges—William Mallory Sr., Arnice Smith (College Hill Children’s Librarian), and Thelma Henderson (retired West End staff member)—had the hardest job

of all—picking the winning essay. After great deliberation, it was announced that there were two winners. Douglas Lee, Jr., and his cousin Mae’lesha Shawntell Lee did an *outstanding* job with their essay writing and oral presentation. Other participants did not go home without something. Branch Manager Kathy Bach presented a bag of Library goodies for everyone, while George encouraged all to try again next year.

✓ **Information about the Main Library and 41 branch libraries is available on the Internet site: www.CincinnatiLibrary.org.**