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800 Vine Street  
Cincinnati, Ohio  
45202-2071  
[www.CincinnatiLibrary.org](http://www.CincinnatiLibrary.org)

Phyllis Hegner  
Assistant Manager PR  
Phone (513) 369-4571  
Fax (513) 369-4565  
[Phyllis.Hegner@CincinnatiLibrary.org](mailto:Phyllis.Hegner@CincinnatiLibrary.org)

Richard Helmes  
Public Information Officer  
Phone (513) 369-6959  
Fax (513) 369-4565  
[Rick.Helmes@CincinnatiLibrary.org](mailto:Rick.Helmes@CincinnatiLibrary.org)

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## Community Demonstrates Tremendous Support for “Libraries Make a Difference Rally”

Over 800 enthusiastic library supporters of all ages and backgrounds gathered together to show their support at the “Libraries Make a Difference Rally.” The rally, which was sponsored by the Friends of the Public Library, was held on Fountain Square in downtown Cincinnati on April 20 at noon. Many came carrying their own homemade signs touting praises for the library. More than a dozen colorful, 20-ft. murals were also positioned around the Square. Each one was hand-painted by a group of children illustrating their love of their favorite neighborhood library.

“The rally did an excellent job of focusing attention on the value libraries provide to the community and raising awareness of the impact the proposed state budget reductions would have on library service,” said Kim Fender, Executive Director of the Public Library of Cincinnati & Hamilton County, who led off a series of speakers who came to share their passion for the Library. “The stories of the speakers who came to share how the library has changed their lives were very powerful and inspirational.”

Jeff Waltz, Vice President of the Library Friends’ Board, emceed the rally and introduced the rest of the speakers. They included a diverse representation from the community such as Abda Tall (West End), a French-speaking native of Africa who talked about how the library helped him learn English skills. “I think closing the libraries is like closing all the connections between East and Western culture. For example, in the year 2004 alone the West End Branch gave more than 200 library cards to African immigrants and set classes for every Tuesday. Now more than 200 African immigrant families know how to read and write, can go around to fill out their own job applications, and make medical appointments. Losing a branch, such as this for me, is like losing a loved one.”

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Another speaker Kenny Burck (Greenhills), President of the Hamilton County Genealogical Society said, "My hobby is genealogy and our History & Genealogy Department has one of the biggest collections of genealogical information in the world. Last year we experienced reduced hours on some weekday evenings, and soon the downtown Main Library will close its doors to patrons on Sundays. This particularly hurts those researching their family history as many genealogists are retired or older citizens less likely to travel downtown on weekdays or at night."

Speaking on behalf of the entire 7<sup>th</sup> grade class of Nativity School in Pleasant Ridge Caroline Kull said, "All through my life the library has always been there for me, as an after school hang out, as a quiet place to do homework, as a resource for projects, and as an Internet service. "...Because of their influence (libraries), reading is one of my favorite things to do. Libraries all over the city have helped children to enjoy reading in the same way."

Julia Pitstick (age 6) who spoke at the rally with her Mother said, "I like the Library because it is fun and I have my own library card. I get to pick out lots of books. My mom and dad read them to me. Now I can read books to my mom and dad, too." Julia, who won a prize in the Library's "Making a Difference" writing competition last fall, went on to say, "I have been at the library almost every Wednesday for storytime since I was a baby. My library is the Delhi Branch. I love it."

Other speakers also cited their perspectives on why they support the library. They included: father, retired businessman, and history buff Tom Huenefeld (Hyde Park); Charlene Rack, who homeschools three children; Cincinnati Public Schools Literacy Specialist Carla Makela (Pleasant Ridge); Ohio Commissioner of Hispanic/Latino Affairs Anthony Simms-Howell (Blue Ash); President of the Library's Teen Council Jasmine Nazek (Blue Ash and a junior at Sycamore High School); Senior Corps of Retired Executives (SCORE) member Jack Espelage; lifelong library user Shirley Colbert (West End); award-winning freelance writer John Fleischman (West End); homeschooler Ms. Indigo (Avondale); Robert Harris from the Cincinnati Council of Christians and Jews, who is also an artist; 7<sup>th</sup> grader at W.E. B. DuBois Academy Ashley Johnson (West End); community outreach worker George Roberts (Madisonville); and longtime library customers David Phillips and John Marion. Library Board Trustee President Charlie Anness (Delhi) concluded by thanking everyone for coming and sharing their stories.

"The outpouring of love and support for our library that has been demonstrated by the community is enormously gratifying," said Anne Keller (North Avondale), Executive Director for the Library Friends. "But we still need your help and support. If you haven't done so yet, we encourage you to contact your state senator about the proposed budget cuts and tax reforms that would greatly impact our beloved library."

For more information on library funding and how to contact your legislator go to: <http://www.cincinnati.library.org/news/2005/callforaction.html>. The entire rally event will air shortly on local cable access. To find out the airing schedule call (513) 651-4171 (ext. 18). For more photographs of the rally visit: <http://www.cincinnati.library.org/news/2005/libraryrally.html>.