



Hartford Library Honored For Its Connection To The Community

The Hartford Public Library received the LibraryAware Community Award... (Stephen Dunn)

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HARTFORD — — Three mornings per week, Iraqi refugee Faeza Aldoori sits in the Hartford Public Library with immigrants from Sri Lanka, Sudan and Peru, learning the American alphabet.

Aldoori participates in the Hartford Public Library's English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) classes, one of the library's many community outreach programs for which it was honored recently with the LibraryAware Community Award.

The Hartford Public Library is one of three in the country to receive the national, newly-created award for its work helping residents such as Aldoori.

Roy Futterman, advertising director at the Library Journal, which sponsors the award, presented a bronze plaque to Mayor Pedro Segarra and a \$5,000 check to the library in a ceremony at the Old State House Wednesday morning.

"You walk through the front doors of the library and you just find yourself immediately energized by all the people in the library," said Sally Whipple, executive director of the Old State House. "You see people gather there to exchange ideas, information, stories, they're sharing formally, they're sharing informally, and that happens because the library is a true community resource."

Futterman said the award was created when he realized librarians were truly motivated by their communities.

"We have many awards – we do librarian of the year, we do library of the year, we even do a politician of the year," Futterman said. "But the interesting thing is we haven't touched on the community before. That community is why the librarians are doing their job."

Segarra, speaking in a mix of Spanish and English, said the library is a haven for all types of people.

"I'm going to talk in different languages because one of the things about Hartford is that we have such a great community as represented by all these nations. Hartford can actually hold in its hands the whole entire world, and this award proves that we're really capable of doing that," he said.

The library also offers citizenship classes, help with immigration forms, and offers one-on-one tutoring to those who need it.

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Homa Naficy, manager of outreach and multicultural education at the library, said she works at least 60 hours per week managing the various programs. "You're a social worker, you're an educator and you're a librarian," she said.

Naficy said teaching people to be digitally literate is most important, as many people who visit the library don't have access to the Internet, or don't know how to use it.

"Our library is more important for the community now than it ever was before," she said. "If you're homeless, you can't even download the form from Section 8 [housing] — that's online. The only way you can access your government is online, that's why it's critical."