

[Photos Attached]

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Books Project Initiated at FAU Libraries Gives People in Two Nations Opportunities to Read English

BOCA RATON, FL (September 9, 2008) – Florida Atlantic University Libraries have redirected thousands of English language books that are not needed by its library users to Armenia and Iraq, enabling librarians in those nations to augment their collections and offer a larger variety of titles to readers.

The library's grass roots effort, which now includes a network of Southeast Florida libraries as partners and an Iraqi university as a recipient, began after Dr. William Miller, dean of University Libraries at FAU, returned from Armenia following the September 2001 terrorist attacks. The visit was Miller's first of three on behalf of the U.S. Department of State Speaker/Consultant Program to do outreach with Armenian librarians.

"Before 1991, books to Soviet Bloc countries were provided free of charge centrally from Moscow, and of course, they were all in Russian," said Miller. "After the fall of the Soviet Union, the book shipments stopped, and the countries had no money to purchase books. By 2001, the libraries had basically acquired no books for a decade and also had little or nothing in English."

Miller and his staff at the S.E. Wimberly Library on FAU's Boca Raton campus began the project by setting aside appropriate books among duplicates from their gifts program. The first books shipped were mainly science and technology books that were donated by an area publisher of scientific research manuals or books that had been superseded. Miller occasionally tossed in books from his personal collection. "The emphasis was always on current, quality material, either in science or in history, literature and other areas of great interest," he said.

After the project got underway, Miller and Tom Sloan, executive director of the Southeast Florida Library Information Network (SEFLIN), who has also visited Armenia as a consultant for the State Department on numerous occasions, collaborated on how to provide ongoing assistance to Armenian libraries.

SEFLIN, which includes FAU Libraries among its membership of more than 300 libraries, assumed the project, named it the SEFLIN Gifts Book Program and began shipping books to Armenia in January 2006. The project's name has since been changed to the SEFLIN Gift Library Materials Program.

SEFLIN, a nonprofit group founded in 1984, fosters cooperation among member libraries and partners to advance staff development, information services, resource sharing, the recognition and promotion of libraries, and disaster preparedness and response planning.

It ships five boxes of books weekly from its offices at the S.E. Wimberly Library. Books to Armenian libraries are sent through the U.S. Department of State to the U.S. Embassy in Armenia for distribution. Books to Iraq are sent through the Department of Civilian Affairs, U.S. Armed Forces.

About 3,500 of the books shipped by SEFLIN have been academic titles, while about 3,200 have been books designated for grade schools and public libraries. More than 100 titles on the study of the English language have been donated to language institutes. FAU Libraries have given at least 55 percent of the books for the effort over the past two years. In addition, Lynn University, Palm Beach Community College, Lighthouse Pointe Library, and members of the S.E. Florida Independent School Libraries Consortium have donated books, microfilm, videotapes and other library materials.

Amed Demirhan, library director of the University of Kurdistan Hawler Library, an English language university in Erbil, Iraq, said he has noticed a change in his students since his library began receiving the books. “The connectivity gives our students the feeling that they are part of the global community and not isolated anymore,” said Demirhan, a former Broward County Library employee, who requested the books before returning home to Iraq.

Sloan says it has been gratifying to see and understand how important the library materials are to the recipients in both nations. In December 2007, he delivered English language books, including books for children, to a 6,000-square foot community library that served 135,000 people.

“The program has been a good community-building as well as library-building activity,” said Sloan. “We are fortunate to have FAU’s support and happy that this project has turned out to be a successful partnership.”

In addition to the ongoing book shipments, FAU Libraries have an interlibrary loan agreement with American University of Armenia’s Papazian Library. The agreement, signed in 2001, allows the Armenian university to receive electronic photocopies of periodicals, conference papers, government documents and other materials from FAU Libraries.

For more information on the project, contact Tom Sloan at 877-733-5460 or sloan@fau.edu, or Dr. William Miller at 561-297-3717 or miller@fau.edu.

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Cutlines:

Photo#1 Cutline: Dr. William Miller, dean of University Libraries, and Tom Sloan, director of Southeast Florida Information Network, review books at the S.E. Wimberly Library.

Photo #2 Cutline: Sgt. Christopher P. Borden, Department of Civilian Affairs, who helped to deliver SEFLIN books to the University of Kurdistan Hawler Library in Erbil, Iraq, shown at the library with Amed Demirhan.

Photo #3 Cutline: A student at the Charents Secondary School in Yerevan, Armenia, reads a library book given through the SEFLIN program.