Wichita Director Chosen for Excellence in Public Service Award

by Jennifer Heinicke, Special Projects Librarian, Wichita Public Library

Cynthia Berner Harris, director of libraries for the Wichita Public Library (City of Wichita), was surprised to learn she was chosen as a 2007 Excellence in Public Service winner in front of a crowd of elected officials, Library Board members, employees and family. Also in attendance were Bill and Dick DeVore, donors of the $2,500 cash prize awarded to Berner Harris. Chosen out of over one thousand eligible employees, Berner Harris was selected as the City representative for her strong work ethic, high performance, commitment to community and leadership qualities.

"One of the impressive things about Cynthia's volunteer service is that she often is training other women to be leaders as well," remarked Jennifer Heinicke, special projects librarian and Berner Harris' nominator. "In her work on different projects with the Junior League of Wichita, that's a constant thread: she's always helping others become stronger and smarter."

Berner Harris was praised for her work in improving the Library's functioning both internally and externally since her appointment as director of libraries in 2000. Among the achievements noted in the nomination include the opening of two new branch library facilities, the adoption of a new master plan for library facilities and four straight years of increased circulation. Internal improvements in library organization, communication and training were also hailed, as was Berner Harris' leadership in statewide library issues.

This is not the first accolade of the year for Berner Harris. In January, Berner Harris was recognized by the State Library of Kansas with a Shining Star Award, primarily for her leadership role as a lead organizer for local arrangements and planning for the 2006 Kansas Book Festival.