



# LIBRARY SERVICES IN SPANISH MUY BUENO!

by Doug Bentin

Hispanic culture is as much a part of the overall feel of the American southwest as Puritan culture is in New England. The Metropolitan Library System recognizes the contributions of Hispanic culture to the diversity that is Oklahoma City with two library locations that specialize in bringing library services to Hispanic library customers.

"The Capitol Hill Library serves as an integral part of the local hispanic community," said Capitol Hill Manager of Library Operations Phil Tolbert. "It is within walking distance for a lot of our customers and I have often thought of it as an extension of their own personal home environment. I'd say at least 75 percent of our customers are Hispanic."

Marie Nichols, Extension Specialist at the Wright Library in Stockyard City, feels much the same way. "I find my Spanish-speaking customers are comfortable here. They are hard workers and make up about 25 percent of my customers."

As is the case in most neighborhood libraries, the staff at Capitol Hill and Wright know many of their customers by name.

"Our customers also seem eager to meet us when they come into the library," Tolbert added. "There is rarely a language barrier as some of the staff speak Spanish and most customers know some English or have friends or relatives who can translate.

"We also try to maintain a comfortable atmosphere where things are easy to find and use, and we are eager to provide further assistance whenever needed."

The number of materials in Spanish the libraries' collections maintain grows as a need for more items

is perceived. Among these materials, the most widely used are those on learning the English language, which the libraries have in book format as well as audio cassettes, CD's, video and DVD formats. They also have bi-lingual (English/Spanish) materials. There is also demand for Spanish materials on practical daily living, which include GED test preparation, job training, as well as cooking, home repair, and care for pets. Capitol Hill and Wright have well-used Spanish fiction collections, and many of their motion pictures in the English DVD collections have Spanish sub-titles. Spanish magazines (called "revistas") are also popular.

"My Hispanic customers have a rich and colorful culture," Nichols said, "and I believe that in the near future, all of us will need to know how to speak a little Spanish. Hispanics are an important force in our culture."

"Hispanic culture, like all cultures," Tolbert said, "is very important to the city. Knowledge of other cultures expands our horizons as humans.

"But our intent at every MLS library is to provide excellent customer service to the entire community. Whenever possible, we reach out into the community, which includes people of every ethnicity, by visiting various locations to promote the library or invite groups to the library where we offer everything from free books to live entertainment.

"We hope that these and all related activities will stimulate and maintain an overall healthy thirst for knowledge."