

# • CHILD'S PLAY •



A PUBLICATION OF THE USA TOY LIBRARY ASSOCIATION

Spring 2015

USA-TLA: Promoting Development Through Toys and Play

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## USA-TLA Shout-out: 30 Years and Counting!

*By Judith Iacuzzi, Executive Director*

**T**hirteen smart and dedicated people launched the USA Toy Library Association (USA-TLA) three decades ago. They were toy librarians spanning the United States, California to Connecticut. One of their first activities as a spanking new organization was to host a national conference. It turned out to be a success and set the Chicago-based organization on a trajectory that continues today.

USA-TLA's provision of education to professionals working with young children has blossomed. We've co-hosted about 25 conferences in 30 years, and will do so twice in 2015. Although we've been in many states – California, New Mexico, Minnesota, Michigan, Missouri, Illinois, Pennsylvania, New York, New Jersey and Ohio – we still have more paths to walk, people to meet, places to share the story of play.

The emphasis on play for the sake of play has not changed as far as topics and what our speakers know best. They come from many backgrounds and shed varied professional lights on how play and quality toys engender health and well-being in children. The self-driven nature of play seems most inspiring. Yes, children will learn (most of them anyway) how to read and write and interact, but play allows them to carve the path that works best in their brains and emotional makeup. We keep repeating the message of play for play's sake because there is such a tendency

to direct the flow of experience in those younger than us. As adults we do that directing without thinking so we must be deliberate in allowing our children time to figure out their playtime for themselves. What we as professionals can offer are the tools and rich environments to evoke quality playtime for learning and making connections in the world.

As you know, play and toy libraries are worldwide so we wanted to share that important fact in the beginning. At our first conference in 1985, at least two international representatives – Marion Hobbelink from the Netherlands and Julie Creighton from Canada – discussed play, toys and toy testing, in Julie's case. Steve Kanor from Enabling Devices whose toys sell worldwide, led a workshop on how to adapt toys to varying abilities. Once one gets into the details, the subject of play, toys and play environments mushrooms. Thirty years later there continues to be aspects of the subject to learn and study.

Our last conference – in October 2014 – took place in Los Angeles, the mother lode of toy lending worldwide. While we were celebrating USA-TLA's 30th anniversary, the Los Angeles Toy Loan was celebrating its 80th! Twenty-five toy librarians were in the audience, about half of all the toy librarians serving the L.A. program. L.A. offers an vast collection of toys and games that fill the shelves of a large warehouse and circulate to 52 sites throughout



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## 30 Years and Counting!

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the county delivered in their own “Toy Loan” van! The program is vibrant and growing under the leadership of Marcia Benitez.

Marcia is one of 40 professionals who have been recognized by USA-TLA over the years for key roles in expanding the scope and influence of toy lending. The *Jane Donelson Player of the Year Award* singles out the best of our national community of players. People like Sally deVincentis, Rhoda Redleaf, Martin Stone, Susan Moore-Myers and Gayle Kranz, all of whom founded the USA-TLA so that professionals doing credible work around play could connect, have received this award. Many others instrumental to expanding the network – people like Nina Hillery, Elaine Adler, Donna Giannantonio, Sue Kirschner and Burnie Horton – continue to give deeply of their time and resources.

Many award recipients were and are integrally involved in international toy lending, either through study or hands-on learning. Connecting play with children all around the world remains a national imperative of the USA-TLA. We celebrate the connectivity fostered by the International Toy Library Association. Hopefully we will meet our colleagues overseas face-to-face one day soon. In the meantime, we relish the written and cyber communications from around the world.

### At the Los Angeles Conference, October 2014



*Toy library leaders, l to r: Anne Friederichs, Rhoda Redleaf, Marcia Benitez, Judy Iacuzzi and Tammy Byington*



*Honorary Board members Sally deVincentis (left) and Susan Moore-Myers flank Iacuzzi.*



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Articles, suggestions and letters are welcome.

*Child's Play* newsletter is written, edited, designed and produced by Iacuzzi Associates.

### Rhoda Redleaf Receives Highest Honor

Founding USA-TLA Board member Rhoda Redleaf was honored with the Alumnae Citation award from her alma mater Lawrence University this winter. The college website notes the following:

Rhoda (Rosen) Redleaf '54 has dedicated her life to improving opportunities for young children. She is a founder and emeritus board director of Think Small—formerly called Resources for Childcaring—a toy lending library and training center created in 1971. Today Think Small is a nationally recognized nonprofit organization providing services, training, resources, and advocacy for early childhood education in Minnesota. The agency's press division, originally called Toys and Things Press, was renamed Redleaf Press after Rhoda's retirement from teaching, and remains a leading nonprofit publisher of child development, curriculum, management, and business materials for early child-

hood professionals and families. Rhoda herself is the author of several imaginative books on play and toy-making.

She is an active volunteer and philanthropist in the Minneapolis-St. Paul area and for the USA Toy Library Association where she offers wisdom on early childhood, toys and learning.

*The Citation for Achievement* is given to a person or persons whose work embodies the values and ideals of a Sarah Lawrence education, with the understanding that there is no one yardstick for achievement.



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### Spring Gala to honor Elaine and Mike Adler

At its spring 2015 gala, "Out of This World," Children's Aid and Family Services of Paramus, N.J., will pay tribute to individual honorees Elaine and Mike Adler of Franklin Lakes, N.J. Elaine and Mike founded the Adler Aphasia Center in 2003, and Elaine has served on the board of the USA Toy Library Association for 15 years.

The spring gala raises money to serve vulnerable children and families in northern New Jersey.

Elaine and Mike cofounded Myron Corp., a mail order firm specializing in marketing products to other businesses, in 1949. After Mr. Adler suffered a stroke that left him with aphasia, a language disorder that is not well understood, he and Mrs. Adler founded the Adler Aphasia Center in 2003. It is a thriving facility with more than 100 active participants working together.

Mrs. Adler serves on the following boards in addition to USA-TLA: Adler Aphasia Center, Arnold P. Gold Foundation for Humanism in Medicine, the Center for Inter-Religious Understanding, Community Resource Council, the Jewish Home and Rehabilitation Center, Ramapo College Board of Governors and Gilda's Club. She and Mr. Adler are longtime supporters of Children's Aid and Family Services and founded the *Elaine Adler Toy Library* at the agency's Turrell Child Care & Early Learning Center.

Both Elaine and Mike have received honorary doctorate degrees from Ramapo College, which they have also supported generously over the years. They have been honored by the ADL, UJA, Boys Town of Jerusalem, Ramapo College, Bergen Community College, Hadassah and the National Aphasia Association.



Mike and Elaine Adler  
Photo courtesy of CAFS



## Clues to Adapting a Toy Library

*Excerpted from American Libraries Journal*

**T**he process of starting a toy library for exceptional children may seem daunting, especially for those who don't know much about children with special needs. To help get started, contacting a therapist who's well versed in disabilities and assistive technology may be advisable. The upside with a public library setting is that most libraries have much of the infrastructure already in place: cataloging and borrowing systems, etc.

Educating staff about the kinds of disabilities they may see and how toys can be adapted to help all children play is key. Staff need to learn how to approach families, letting them know the resources you have. You could have a wonderful collection, but if the staff doesn't buy into it, it may be less successful.

Librarian Lois Eannel gets teary-eyed when she remembers one meaningful afternoon at her toy library. She saw a mom bring her son into the early childhood section of the Palm Harbor, Fla. Library and lay him down on the brightly colored rug. He must have been about eight years old, she thought, but a physical disability left him unable to sit up.

Eannel, then director of the children's library, tapped the mom on the

shoulder and told her she had something for her son. A short while later she brought out a Side-Lyer toy—a device made for children with special needs, with beads and lights that make sounds and vibrate when lightly touched.

“Within a minute, he was smiling and laughing, stimulating the toy to make the music and the lights,” Eannel said. “He was so happy.”

It was a moment made possible by Eannel's efforts to create an adaptive toy library for her families. The “Toys and Tools to Go” collection at Palm Harbor now has more than 100 toys available on loan for any family that wants to borrow them. Each toy is specially adapted—some with switches, lights, or other adjustments that enable children with physical or mental disabilities to play with them.

Eannel first learned about adaptive toy libraries at her previous job at Middle Country Public Library on Long Island, N.Y., also a member of USA-TLA. When the library got a grant from the state health department's Early Intervention Program to build an adaptive toy library she was assigned to create it. “It has been amazing to see the children enjoy and learn by having these types of toys and devices.”



2015 © Anthony Iacuzzi

### Still favored after all these years!

Some toys have staying power. Here are 32 playthings that have been on the market, pretty much unchanged, for at least 50 years. Even better, they still sell for \$50 or less.

- |                    |                                   |                                      |                                  |
|--------------------|-----------------------------------|--------------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| - Play-Doh         | - Shoot the Moon                  | - Sorry!                             | - Ant Farm                       |
| - Frisbee          | - Viewmaster                      | - Eloise Doll by<br>Madame Alexander | - Cootie                         |
| - Wood-burning Set | - Yahtzee                         | - Candy Land                         | - Corn Popper by<br>Fisher-Price |
| - Scrabble         | - Hula Hoop                       | - Tinkertoy Set                      | - Jack-in-the-Box                |
| - Spill and Spell  | - Colorforms                      | - Barbie                             | - Wiffle Ball                    |
| - Duncan Yo-Yo     | - Hohner Marine<br>Band Harmonica | - Go to the Head<br>of the Class     | - Silly Putty                    |
| - Monopoly         | - Slinky                          | - Magic 8-Ball                       | - Lincoln Logs                   |
| - Pogo Stick       | - Chutes and Ladders              |                                      | - LEGGOs                         |
| - Clue             |                                   |                                      |                                  |

## USA-TLA Member Reports In

**C**at Davila, president of PDX Toy Library in Portland, Ore., posted on the TLA Facebook site many things about her healthy operation – first that she has enjoyed using libraryworld.com for her toy library catalog.

Cat also recommends a membership structure of offering either quarterly or annual memberships and 50% discounts for low-income families.

“Our whole collection is a donation from the public retailers. We have a take-it-all policy, and it has worked well. We have more than 200 items in the lending collection and a large shelf of items needing cataloging. Other shelf items are for sale at thrift-store prices.

These are donated items that can’t be circulated but are desirable. Items like art supplies, high quality stuffed animals, games too advanced for our age range.

One big thing: Cat would like more space to organize events. “We need to focus more on community outreach and have received a grant for that. We have about 15 members now despite our minimal advertising. We will begin bringing in performers and hosting game nights and classes in the adjoining space, which is available for our use on an hourly basis.”

*Post your concerns/interests on USA-TLA’s Facebook page or write to [jqi@comcast.net](mailto:jqi@comcast.net).*

## New Toy Library Rocks the New Mexico Block

**M**ore than 80 people turned out in April for the grand opening of the Disabilities Resource Center in Silver City, New Mexico. The new center offers community space, an assistive technology lending library and a toy library.

“Look at what we have today,” said Susie Trujillo, a founding member of the Grant County Disability Advisory Council. “We started working two years ago on this project with the support of then-Mayor James Marshall and Town Manager Alex Brown.

The town of Silver City, Life Quest, Inc., Western New Mexico University, and the Grant County Disability Advisory Council partnered to make the Disabilities Resource Center a reality.

Further support for equipment for the lending library was received through a \$42,000 grant from the

New Mexico Technology Assistance Program of the Governor’s Commission on Disability. Community members also made donations.

The center will become a hub for the community, located in rural southwest New Mexico and utilized for “parent support groups, social learning, group gatherings, educational trainings, mentoring, play groups and therapy.”

Western New Mexico University social work intern Mackie Thoutt conducted an assessment to see the that the lending library was stocked with equipment the community most needed. “I was most surprised that people wanted simple things, devices for communication and education,” Thoutt said.

For information, call 575-388-1976.



*Most attendees gathered for a photo op at the Oct. 2014 conference co-hosted by USA-TLA and Los Angeles County Toy Loan. The L.A. Toy Loan is the oldest toy library in the world. It thrives today with 50 sites throughout Los Angeles under the able direction of Marcia Benitez.*

### TLA Remembers Luminary Brian Sutton-Smith

**W**e remember in the early years of toy libraries the influence of Brian Sutton-Smith. He gave intelligence and dignity to the idea of play.

In his March 15, 2015, obituary in *The New York Times*, alongside a wonderful photo ran the following history of his life and work (excerpted).

“Professor Sutton-Smith was one of the first people to bring the study of play into the academic arena, and for more than half a century he was considered the field’s foremost scholar. He was the author of a spate of books, including “Toys as Culture” (1986) and “The Ambiguity of Play” (1987); a consultant to toy makers and children’s television programs; and a regular presence in the news media, which quoted him on subjects including the inclination of modern-day schools to abolish recess (a trend he deplored) and helicopter parents (ditto).

“Though Professor Sutton-Smith’s work was concerned in particular with the spontaneous play of children, it also examined the larger forces that underpinned play of all kinds – ‘what a child’s make-believe, a parent’s crossword puzzles and another parent’s endless rounds of golf might have in common’ – as he

wrote in a 2008 article.

“Throughout his career he sought to answer a set of fundamental questions: What is play? Why do human beings engage in it? What psychological, cognitive and cultural functions does it serve?

“The answer, he concluded after six decades of study, was one that befit his quicksilver quarry: No single definition could contain it.

“‘Something about the nature of play itself frustrates fixed meaning,’ he wrote in 2008. ‘Just as some scholars spend their lives consumed by the metaphysics of literature or history or philosophy or theology – you name it – I came to spend mine in search of the metaphysics of play.’”

The professor was born in Wellington, New Zealand, on July 15, 1924. He traveled to the USA as a Fulbright scholar in 1952, studied at the University of California, Berkeley, and worked elsewhere with the psychologists Bruno Bettelheim and Fritz Redl. He taught at Bowling Green State University in Ohio, Columbia University Teachers College and ultimately, the University of Pennsylvania where he was emeritus professor in the graduate school of education.

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### Creative Play Overnight at the Library

**T**heir special friends came to life one night at the Harriotte B. Smith Library in Camp Lejeune, N.C., during the well executed and highly successful Stuffed Animal Sleepover.

To begin with, the young children, each carrying a furry friend, gathered at the library to enjoy popcorn and a movie. Stuffed animals received name tags and were introduced to one other by excited children before the movie started. However, when show time ended and it was time to separate, there was some reluctance to leave behind the stuffed compadres. But the adults assured the children that their friends needed this special night alone, would be well provided for and would return with stories to share.



“We’ve come to library movies before, but this was something different with the Stuffed Animal Sleepover,” said one child. “I thought it was a really cute idea; it reminded me of ‘Toy Story.’”

The children and their families left, and the fun began. Monkeys, puppies, teddy bears and other animals of all varieties, tame and wild, gathered around for stories read by library staff, watch movies, play video games and work puzzles.

They explored the library and at last collapsed for the promised overnight snooze.

The next morning the children and families hurried to the library. Each child collected his furry friend and a disc of pictures that revealed how much fun the wakeful animals had at their first-ever Library Sleepover.



# Toy Library Resources Order Form

Item	Qty.	Member	Non-Member
<b>Child's Play Newsletter</b> Included with Membership. An 8-page periodical full of news and information about toy libraries and related topics.		N/A	\$15.00 per copy
<b>USA Toy Library Association Operator's Manual</b> Everything you need to know about setting up and operating a toy library.		\$12.50	\$25.00
<b>Read It! Play It!</b> by Joanne and Stephanie Oppenheim An illustrated, 112-page book of fun activities that build literacy through reading and playing.		\$12.50	\$25.00
<b>Read It! Play It! With Babies and Toddlers</b> by Joanne and Stephanie Oppenheim An illustrated, 103-page book that builds literacy with babies and toddlers. <b>Now in English and Spanish.</b> Please specify.		\$12.50	\$25.00
<b>Hey Kids! Out the Door, Let's Explore</b> by Rhoda Redleaf This 245-page masterwork includes twenty-seven nature, community and concept walks.		\$18.00	\$36.00
<b>Theme Kits Made Easy</b> by Leslie Silk Eslinger A 161-page book of clever ideas based on "teaching themes" (fairy tales, animals, city life, etc.) packaged as "kits." A great teaching tool for providers, parents and teachers.		\$20.00	\$40.00
<b>The Power of Play</b> A discussion about early childhood education with Dr. Michael K. Meyerhoff, The Epicenter Inc.		\$5.00	\$10.00

Sub-Total \$

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Check No.

To order, complete this form and return it with payment to:

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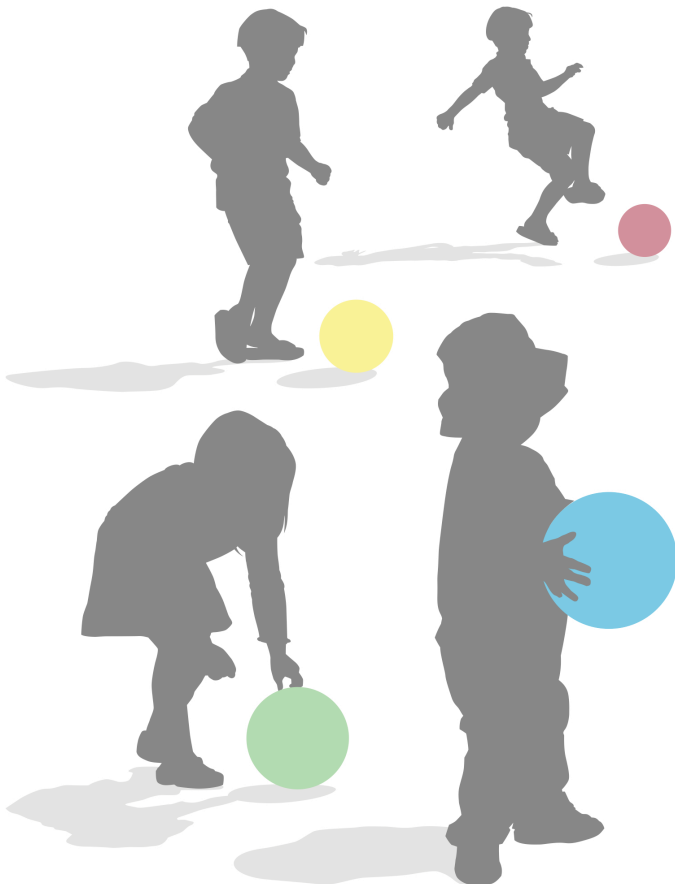
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## Save the Date!

USA-TLA and the Cuyahoga County Public Library and several others will host

## PLAY TO LEARN, LEARN TO PLAY

A conference for educators, social workers,  
toy librarians, librarians and parents.

**OCTOBER 17, 2015**

8:30 AM – 3:00 PM

Parma-Snow  
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Parma, OH 44134

Watch [www.usatla.org](http://www.usatla.org) and our Facebook page  
for more information!