

# • CHILD'S PLAY •



A PUBLICATION OF THE USA TOY LIBRARY ASSOCIATION

Fall 2011

USA-TLA: Promoting Development Through Toys and Play

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## Lucky Fourth Conference Delivers a(nother) Winner

It was the day of the Kentucky Derby, and all wagers were on the USA-TLA-Turrell Childcare and Early Learning Center conference in Paramus, N.J., happening in the daytime hours before the race. Entitled, "Ready, Set, Explore!" the conference looked anew at hands-on learning. It was the fourth conference sponsored by the two organizations, and the polish showed.

Some 55 attendees shut the door on one of the North's better spring days and bet their Saturday on a great indoor event. It did not disappoint – the evaluations revealed that each speaker offered content that was fresh and valued.

Three celebrity spokeswomen, trusted names to the USA-TLA, took over the podium for 90 minutes and gave attendees new tools for preschool teaching.

First was Nina Hillery, infant/toddler specialist, formerly with First Steps, Child Care Connection in Akron, Ohio, and before that, for 25 years, head of the Toy and Resource Center, also in Akron.

### Hillery Homes In on Letting Go

In Hillery's workshop, attendees spent 45 minutes creating artwork – self-portraits and other creations with buckets of materials Hillery provided. They chatted about what it was like, trying to fit into their preschoolers shoes, when given paper, scissors, crayons, yarn, ribbon and other materials to work with. They learned that when authorities (i.e., teachers) "let go," those in their care (i.e., students) become creative and problem-solvers.

"These exercises demonstrated the meaning of 'hands-on,'" said Hillery, "by providing accessible materials so children are working with what they are interested in. This leads to longer attention spans and greater learning opportunities.

"This is play through art, and the typical outcome is that the child is engaged—not just doing something mechanically, but actively concentrating on and enjoying the process. That's the difference: the learning is self-directed at a very young age."

Peals of laughter rocked the room as attendees paired off for a "hand-dance" mirroring game. Following the beat of music playing in the background, one of the two-some took the lead and "danced" with her hands, palms facing her partner. Her partner, in turn, mirrored the other's movements with her hands. No hand-touching was allowed as the four hands moved in unison.

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*That's the difference: the learning is self-directed at a very young age.*

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"To be successful we had to carefully watch our partner and anticipate how she would move her hands to the music, using our ears, eyes and intuition. Would her hands move right, left, up, down, in a circle, etc.?" "We also had to 'get back into it' when we made a mistake or false start," commented one participant. "We had to really concentrate."

### Rhoda Redleaf calls for reflection on play value

Rhoda Redleaf, instructor and author who has spent much of her life teaching childcare providers through on-site instruction and books, came next to the podium and spoke about the diminished play opportunities in childhood today. She emphasized how this lack is bearing out in adulthood with a deficit in creativity and some forms of leadership. She quoted a story that ran in *Newsweek* magazine in 2010.

"For the first time, research shows that American creativity is declining." She read from the opening salvo of the article that pointed to the latest results from the Torrance Tests of Critical Thinking that assess Americans' "CQ" – creativity quotient.

She noted that although not a perfect assessment of creativity, the CQ scores of kids do seem to be a prediction of their "creative accomplishments" as adults.

"Those who came up with more good ideas on Torrance's tasks grew up to

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**The USA-TLA Board Election BALLOT**  
is enclosed in this issue. Please fax to USA-TLA  
at 847-864-8473 by October 30, 2011.

# Showcasing Play the Old-Fashioned Way

By Judith Iacuzzi, Executive Director

**T**he *New York Times* a few months ago ran a story about play. No big news to us in the toy library field, you may say, but it is a big deal in the world today.

The story talks about how a mom is offering costumes and toys to her kids and her kids' friends and letting them "have at it." Go ahead and make up some fun, was the message she gave as she offered the scarves, hats, marbles and balls and let the living room get messy as the children began to play.

The idea of free play, this fall of 2011, is challenged by so many devices. Devices with buttons you hold in your hand and select. Up pops an image on a ready-made screen and off you go

– playing alone with your programmed, tell-you-how-to-do-it, handheld device. These devices – and the time spent with them (seven hours and 38 minutes a day on average per child, according to the *Times*, which was quoting a Kaiser Family



Rhoda Redleaf

Foundation study in 2010) actually challenge imaginary thought processing, an area of the brain that needs stimulation early on to work later on in life. And that's not the only part of the cranium that may be stultified.

We asked our play expert, one of several on the USA-TLA board, Rhoda Redleaf, to respond to this story from the *Times*. We asked her directly about the issue of the interruption of play in modern life, particularly the lives of children. We asked her what toy libraries could do to offset the trend.

"Toy libraries should first and foremost get copies of the story from the *Times*, and think about hosting a play day. That would be an excellent project for an early childhood organization, like a toy library or like-minded group, to encourage play and build awareness and momentum. By focusing on games, open-ended toys like balls and blocks, and using sand, mud and other elements of nature with play potential, the event might open some eyes to its importance and encourage other play events. The whole point is to challenge the ubiquitous Internet, the Xboxes and other technology devices that take up so much time today."

The other aspect, said Ms. Redleaf, an author and respected educator of child care workers, parents and teachers of young children, is to build awareness of this issue. "Make available to parents and members of the toy library and even boards of directors information that play

*Continued on page 3*



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Articles, suggestions and letters are welcome. *Child's Play* newsletter is written, edited, designed and produced by Iacuzzi Associates, Inc.

## Showcasing Play the Old-Fashioned Way

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is being dwarfed, is losing out to less imaginative, cooperative, skill-building, risk-taking activities that are valuable aspects of unprogrammed, self-directed play.

“Emphasize blocks and puzzles and Lego-type toys, trucks and dolls and other materials that encourage problem-solving and skill-building and sorting out situations together so everyone has fun. These kinds of opportunities have been disappearing from our homes and schools,” said Ms. Redleaf, who is the founder of Toys ‘n’ Things in St. Paul, Minn., one of the original toy libraries in the USA.

“With rare exception, a major problem with all the technology is isolation.” Said the founding member of the USA-TLA and current emeritus board member of Resources for Child Caring, a distinguished social service and training program in St. Paul, “Recently there have been a number of articles on the value of outdoor play for children. If toy libraries took up the idea of making parents aware of how to encourage outdoor play, it would balance the indoor play with more physical, imaginative activity good for overall health throughout one’s life.”

Ms. Redleaf knows whereof she speaks. She is the author of best-selling books on handmade toys and creative field trips. Some of her more popular publications include *Busy Fingers*, *Growing Minds*; *Open the Door*, *Let’s Explore More!*; and *Learn and Play the GREEN Way*.

“In fact, I have noticed younger children bored with their

technology devices when they don’t have the latest game to play or application to use.

“I don’t remember my kids being bored,” said the woman who always had a bag of Play-Doh™ and a plastic bag with shaving cream and food coloring around to fuel the play action with her kids at home.

Ms. Redleaf, who has a children’s room named after her in the Hennepin County Library in Minneapolis, recommends discussing the idea of boredom with toy library patrons. “Discuss how to counter its effects. There is a problem that when the technology is absent, kids may not know what to do with themselves.”

Perhaps there’s an opportunity for toy libraries to rearrange their toy inventory to showcase toys that encourage more free-form play, create “toys of the month” that have nothing to do with technology and everything to do with figuring out how to play with other children.

And encourage the parents to lay down their Blackberries™ and sit on the floor with their kids and start playing, too, she added.

Other books to recommend that are available from Redleaf Press catalog include *Developmentally Appropriate PLAY*, by Gaye Gronlund, and *Come and Play*, by Aerial Cross.

“Of course a wonderful resource is an favorite standby read, David Elkin’s *The Power of Play*,” Ms. Redleaf added. ([www.redleafpress.org](http://www.redleafpress.org).)

## L.A. County Toy Loan on Display

The Los Angeles County Toy Loan Program released an Emmy-winning public service announcement (PSA) titled, “Every Child Deserves the Gift of Play” that now airs on Youtube.com for the world to see. The impressive 30-second spot aired locally on cable earlier this year.

The PSA was fully funded by Hollywood’s prestigious “Women in Film” grant program and was produced by film industry executives using professional actors and Toy Loan participants. It highlights many benefits of the widespread program, the most long-standing in the USA, starting in the Great Depression.

L.A. Toy Loan circulates more than 45,000 toys to more than 30,000 children each year. It is 76 years old.

The PSA is posted on the Internet: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6bYimw0vTnQ> or search Los Angeles Toy Loan PSA.

## In Memoriam



**James Rancilio**, former president of USA-TLA, longtime USA-TLA member and devoted librarian, died at home on September 8, 2011.

From Vassar, Mich., where he was library director for 24 years, Rancilio was named Michigan Librarian of the Year in 2007. In addition to a capacious toy library on site, Rancilio launched a book mobile that circulated literary material to incarcerated boys in the area. He was also active in Flint Community Players – where he made hundreds of costumes for their productions, sometimes in the course of a year – the Vassar Chamber of Commerce and the Vassar Cool Cities Committee.

“Jim was exceptional in every way,” said USA-TLA Director L.H. Horton. “He will be sorely missed as a truly outstanding citizen.”

# Conference Roundup

Continued from page 1

be entrepreneurs, inventors, college presidents, authors, doctors, diplomats, and software developers,” Redleaf said, quoting Po Bronson and Ashley Merryman, authors of the Newsweek article. “The correlation to lifetime creative accomplishment was more than three times stronger for childhood creativity than childhood IQ.”

Redleaf encouraged the audience to think this through and reinvigorate play in the classroom every day. She also asked participants to group-up and outline some cost-effective field trips they could undertake with the children they teach. The groups reported back on their ideas and offered such suggestions as going to the grocery store, a hotel, a public library. By examining the set-up, operation, purpose and clientele of each of these facilities, children



will learn about science, math, organization, spelling, reading, safety, health and much more concerning social life and commerce, said Redleaf.

## Eslinger tempts audience with top-of-the-line toys

After brunch Leslie Eslinger, education and product development specialist for Becker School Supply in Penn., led an exploration of a variety of toys. Entitled, “What’s on your Toy Shelf and Why,” Ms. Eslinger, who headed a childcare program in Philadelphia for many years that supported a low-income population of families, started her presentation with an examination of “old favorites” – Hula hoops, Silly Putty and Lincoln Logs (which were designed by famous architect Frank Lloyd Wright), toys that have withstood the test of time. Each one scored high in play value and triggering the imagination. Eslinger looked at the transformation of Mr. Potato Head, which originally was a potato from the garden, and how through technology and innovation, great toys retain their contemporary feel and value. She covered a selection of educational,

colorful, fun and durable toys in her presentation, while the audience took copious notes.

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*...through technology and innovation, great toys retain their contemporary feel and value*

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Ms. Eslinger’s creative thinking is also revealed in a book she wrote called, “Theme Kits Made Easy.” In this excellent compendium (offered on page 7 of this issue of Child’s Play) she provides a wide sampling of themes for teachers to use in lessons on geography, science, history, math, storytelling and the like.

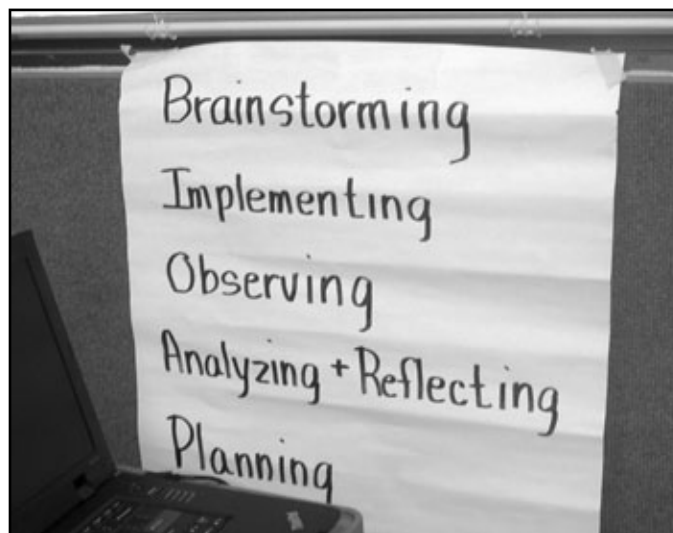
One theme kit, called “Little Red Riding Hood,” recommends that the teacher or childcare provider assemble a kit of materials related to the color red, a discussion of grandparents, the ideas of sickness, health and safety, the woods and other forms of nature, including wolves. She even recommends a deconstruction of the “Little Red Riding Hood” story, one narrated by the wolf.

## At the end of the day...thumbs up

Summarized conference chair Sandy Richards, head of the Turrell Childcare & Learning Center, “We thank Nina, Rhoda and Leslie for their wonderful workshops, providing the attendees with important information, which supported them as teachers.

“The results of the surveys were very good. Our speakers’ respective topics were well chosen, and our audience said so.”

Though not in Kentucky, USA-TLA and Turrell once again took home the blue.



## Stone Honored for Teaching Work

USA-TLA Director **Martin Stone** was selected as Teacher of the Year by the JCC of Mid-Westchester and the Autism Science Foundation in April.

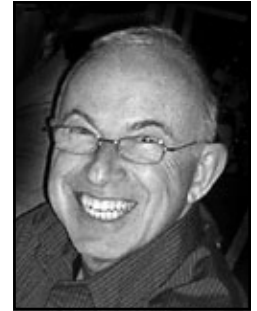
In recognizing Stone, Nancy Kaplan, of JCC Mid-Westchester, wrote “Marty has touched the lives of many children and families during his years of working in the field of special education. He has been a strong advocate for children and a proponent of inclusion for children, especially those with autism, into the educational mainstream.

“Marty began his educational career as a teacher in Brooklyn, N.Y., before becoming the director of education at United Cerebral Palsy of Westchester and Rockland ARC. At these agencies he was responsible for developing curriculum and programs for children with multiple disabilities as well as providing supervision to the teaching staff. He also directed a toy lending library

at UCP that led to his becoming a founding member, present board member and past president of the USA Toy Library Association.

“Marty’s decision to return to teaching over the last 10 years as a special education itinerant teacher at the JCC Mid-Westchester-Toward Tomorrow School has placed him within many community nursery schools and introduced him to many teachers, children and curricula as he works with the children and families to help children navigate the inclusive process.”

The USA Toy Library Association congratulates Stone for this well deserved honor!



*Martin Stone*

## Toy-Lending Boom Hits Midwest

*Taken from the e-newsletter Cleveland Scene, January 2011*

**F**or years, the Cuyahoga County Public Library system in Ohio has operated a toy chest for folks hoping to test-drive that Dora tea set before investing in one. Over the last two years, the number of loaned toys rose by 50 percent – a sign that either a well-intended program is growing in popularity or Cuyahoga’s citizenry is growing in desperation. Maybe both.

And who is using the system? Everybody. “Parents, grandparents, uncles, aunts, and anyone who has children visiting them,” says USA-TLA Director Sue Kirschner, the library’s youth literacy and outreach supervisor and chief toy keeper. “We are finding it’s an economic issue. Everyone in general is trying toys out before they buy.”

Toys designed for special-needs children are especially popular, prompting the library to expand its offerings. “Families cannot afford these toys – which are more expensive – and no other child can play with some of these toys and get something out of it,” Kirschner says.

Cash-strapped early childhood teachers charged with outfitting their own classrooms also frequent the toy library. “Our educational toys are consistently moving from our shelves,” says Kirschner, adding that the frequent rotation is a benefit when faced with a roomful of toddler attention spans.

You can request toys online, then pick them up at the local branch nearest you; toys can also be checked out directly at the Brooklyn branch. On the horizon, says Kirschner, are self-serve toys at additional county library branches.

The most popular library toys? There’s usually a waiting list for the car park and roll around tower. In summer, the play barbecue grill is king.

Kirschner is taking a lead in planning a collaborative conference between the library, Cleveland State, the Public Television station and USA-TLA planned for October 13, 2012. See below.

## Two Play Conferences Set

**R**eaders, note two important conferences co-sponsored by USA-TLA on the drawing board. You won’t want to miss either!

**Friday, May 4, 2012 – St. Paul, Minnesota**, with a focus on the interests of public librarians and how toys and play work within the 21st century library system.

Details forthcoming.

**Saturday, October 13, 2012 – Cleveland, Ohio**, entitled, “*Learning, What’s Play Got to Do with It?*” a one-day event giving special attention to the interests of early childhood professionals, librarians, and social service workers. Details to follow.



# Outstanding Volunteers

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## Book Offers More than Guideposts for Parents

In August USA-TLA received and mailed to members *The Special Needs Parent Handbook*, written by Jonathan Singer about his special-needs daughter, Rebecca. Mr. Singer, a friend of USA-TLA President Elaine Adler, started a foundation and “ambassador’s program” to distribute his book – full of answers to important questions posed by parents of special needs children worldwide – free to libraries. USA-TLA and our members are recipients of this generous program.

“One of the most important stories is about how the library donation program got off the ground,” offers Mr. Singer.

“I went with my kids to drop some books off with a woman who read about our library donation program and wanted to be a volunteer to help deliver books to local libraries.

“We walked around her very large home for quite some time, and I learned that she had an adult son with autism. She wanted to know more about the donation program and told me how important she felt it was to make sure families who couldn’t afford a copy had access to the book.

“When asked about my plans going forward, I mentioned how the printer agreed to produce the books at cost and that if we ordered three thousand copies we could bring our costs down to about \$1.50 a book.

“When we were about to leave, she asked us to wait a few minutes and then handed us an envelope and said she wanted to make a donation.

“When we got in the car and drove around the corner I handed my then 11-year-old son the envelope and asked

him to see what was inside. All of a sudden he shouted, ‘Dad, oh my gosh - it’s a check for \$5000!’

I turned the car around and headed back to the house, rang the doorbell and gave her a big hug. She said how fortunate she felt about her life and how things had gone with her son, and how happy she was to know that she could help many more families.

“A few months later, upon hearing about that donation, my friend Tony was inspired to give another \$5000 to print more books, and he is working on translations into a few other languages.”

### Insights from the Book

Released in late 2010, *The Special Needs Parent Handbook* addresses a range of topics that include finding caregivers, financial planning, advocating for a child and more. It has been translated into Spanish, with Chinese, French and other languages on the horizon. It will be released in digitized form soon for more simplified worldwide circulation.

The school advocacy chapter is particularly compelling. When the Singers moved their daughter Rebecca from a public school to another school (at less cost!) the improvement in her education and learning was nearly instantaneous. Mr. Singer encourages all parents to fight for what is rightly theirs and their child’s.

“Not being able to speak is not the same as not having anything to say,” reads one of Mr. Singer’s favorite t-shirts. He has a lot to say on this subject; it is well worth reading and circulating this thoughtful story.

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## Adlers Awarded for A Lifetime of Contributions

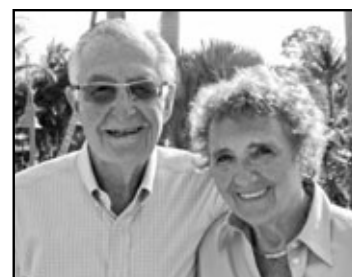
**Elaine and Myron Adler** joined 35 others as recipients of the Jane Donelson Player of the Year award given annually by USA –TLA for exemplary service to children, play and toy-lending libraries.

The Adlers’ interest in toy loan, first prompted by their daughter and mother of twins, began in the 1990s. Their investigation led them to toy libraries in the USA and other parts of the world, including Taiwan, Los Angeles and Chicago.

In 2005 Elaine and “Mike” founded the Adler Toy Library at the Turrell Child Care & Early Learning Center, part of Children’s Aid and Family Services in Paramus, N.J. Children from preschool to kindergarten delight in its holdings.

Ms. Adler became president of USA-TLA two years ago and has led it through its most stable financial period since

the early 1990s. Under her leadership the board has expanded and become involved in several new programs, including Jonathan Singer’s library ambassador’s program described elsewhere in this newsletter.



*Myron and Elaine Adler*

The Adlers are actively involved in building aphasia awareness and support. They have founded a center for people suffering from aphasia – a condition characterized by either partial or total loss of the ability to communicate verbally or using written words – that has gained national attention and been impetus for the creation of other such centers in major cities in North America.



# 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>Learn and Play the Green Way</b> by Rhoda Redleaf and Audrey Robertson An illustrated, 200-page book loaded with suggestions for homemade, sustainable toys that teach.		\$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
<b>Science Fun with Toys</b> by Thomas W. Sills with forward by Judith Q. Iacuzzi A guide for parents and teachers with resource descriptions for unique & educational toys.		\$18.00	\$36.00

Sub-Total \$

\$7.50 Shipping & Handling (Does not apply to Child's Play) \$

Total Amount Enclosed \$

Check No.

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## Play: Basic to Literacy

**A**ccording to the National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA), based in Dublin, Ireland, which provides thought leadership on literacy, “One of the ways children learn is through play. A child who is playing is refining learning skills that continue to develop during childhood and beyond. Adults can help by providing opportunities for different types of play. Play can help to show what children know and understand. Positive attitudes to learning occur when learning is enjoyable and fun.

“Children’s ability to think and understand experiences develops by listening and speaking. As a child’s language becomes more complex so does the ability to understand more complex thoughts and ideas. Early

speech is called ‘babbling’ – when a child is ‘playing’ at making sounds. Parents of different nationalities pick out the sounds that are most like their own language and respond enthusiastically to them.

“Storytelling with young children is more than just looking at or reading books. It creates a relationship between the teller and the listener; between the listener and the story. Stories have an emotional quality that can help children make sense of their feelings. Storybooks play an important role in a child’s development. They help children learn language and reading skills and much of this learning can occur naturally at home.”

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*If you’ve already received a copy of Child’s Play, please pass this along to a friend or colleague. Thank you.*