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Introduction

The "Books That Matter" project was proposed as a way of encouraging members of the Highland Park community to create a list of favorite books to be presented as a gift to readers of the next century. It was soon apparent that the project would also promote discussion of the value and importance of reading generally and raise awareness of the Library as a place of discovery and the source of incalculable pleasure and benefit. All of these goals were embraced enthusiastically as news of the project spread throughout the community.

To give shape and direction to the concept, a committee was formed. Its membership included five individuals from the community and three members of the Library?s professional staff. Among its first items of business, the Committee gave the project the title "Books That Matter," defined the criteria for the inclusion of titles, and proposed a series of actions designed to promote its success. The Committee later recommended the distribution of a publication which would incorporate the titles put forward by the community.

It was agreed from the start that the Committee would solicit titles which readers felt had been important to them personally ? books to which they remained attached and which they continued to think of as memorable, especially pleasing, or particularly stimulating. The Committee emphasized that "Books That Matter" was not a vehicle to nominate the "best" or "most influential" books of the past hundred years or, indeed, of any other period. Rather, the titles that were recommended would reflect reading experiences to which members of the community remained attached and which in their eyes were valuable and deserving enough to be handed on and shared with others. Moreover, the Committee agreed that titles should be solicited from persons of all ages and that no restriction should be placed on the year of publication or the

language of the original publication. However, to make the list as useful as possible, it was agreed that all titles had to be available in English.

It was felt to be essential for the success of the project that as many readers as possible be involved. A logo was developed and flyers distributed which encouraged community members to participate in the creation of the list. The flyer stated:

Please give us your list of books which are inspiring, delightful, indispensable, funny, exceptional. These can be books from your childhood, works read in school, writings about great ideas, or books that had an impact on you or the world we live in.

A separate flyer, directed at children, was also printed, stating:

The Library is putting together a list of all-time favorite books, and we are asking for YOUR choices.

These flyers, which also served as "ballots," were distributed at the Library as well as a number of other community sites. Each household in Highland Park also received a copy through the mail, and sample ballots were printed in the local newspaper. Both North Shore School District 112 and the Highland Park High School actively joined the Library in promoting the project.

The balloting period, which began in late January of 1999, continued through the end of May. More than 4,000 titles were eventually nominated, reflecting the enthusiasm of the public.

Many of the comments accompanying the nominations included recollections of how inspiring or exciting the experience of reading a particular book had been. A sampling of these comments include:

"A work of art, beautifully constructed with controversial implications." "Magnificent biography of the ascendancy of an extraordinary American." "Brilliant book." "This is an amazing book." "It was my father?s favorite and is now mine." "Perhaps the most important and exquisite novel I have ever read?.This poetic, dark, swirling book should be studied and cherished." "Was possibly the best book I?ve ever read." "I stayed up very late many nights reading it." "Moving and inspiring." "A haunting thriller." "?Rings with truth and sorrow." "Absorbing characters, a vivid sense of place and wonderfully written." "Unforgettable." "If you love the English language, you?ll love this book" "The first book that brought tears to my eyes and down my cheeks." "Inspirational" "Beautiful book?." "...An incredible vision of society to come." "An extraordinary book about the journey of life and the quest for spirituality." "Quite possibly the most intelligent, intriguing play I have ever read." "Everyone should have the opportunity to experience the delight that comes in reading this book. The world around you will be reborn." "My favorite book."

In light of the very large number of titles that were submitted, the "Books That Matter" Committee felt that in addition to a complete list of titles, readers would likely welcome selected lists for adults and for youth. It is the intention of the "Books That Matter" Committee to distribute these lists as widely as possible. While the Library will be the main distribution point, copies will also be given to the schools and community centers.

Works of fiction constituted the most popular category of titles. This partiality held true for both

adults and children. The annotated list of readings prepared by the "Books That Matter" Committee reflects this fact.

Many members of the Highland Park community gave unselfishly of their time and effort to see the "Books That Matter" project through to its completion. The Highland Park Public Library wishes to express its appreciation to all of them.

First and foremost, we wish to thank everyone who submitted a ballot. Without the contributions from the community, the project would not have proved successful.

The efforts of members of the "Books That Matter" Committee require a special note of appreciation. Members of the Committee were:

Ann Rosenblum, Chairperson, and former President, Highland Park Public Library Board of Trustees

Necia Apfel, Highland Park author

Michael Belsky, Highland Park City Councilman

Jane W. Greenfield, Executive Director, Highland Park Public Library

Mercedes Mantilla, Director of Technical Services, Highland Park Public Library

Selena Pestine, Board member, Friends of the Highland Park Public Library

Christopher Sheahen, President, Highland Park Public Library Board of Trustees

Linda Wicher, Director of Youth Services, Highland Park Public Library

The Library Board of Trustees supported this project by making it a priority for outreach into the community during the past two years. Appreciation is due to Board members: Christopher Sheahen (President), Angelo Biondi, Robert Bloom, Joan Bruhn, Ruth Freer, Henry Kohn, Kim Levy, Miriam Steinberg, and Gail Taxy, as well as former Board members Joseph Grossman and Ronald Sharlach.

Thanks are also due to Marianne Schapiro, the Library?s Community Relations Coordinator throughout most of the project, and to Library staff members who collected and categorized the nominations and assisted Committee members with a broad range of matters. The "Books That Matter" logo and ballots were designed by Deborah Spector, of Wordspecs.

The Library also wishes to extend its appreciation to the Pioneer Press for its strong support and sponsorship, and for its efforts to bring the "Books That Matter" project to the attention of the general public and to keep its readers up-to-date on its progress.

The publication of "Books That Matter: A List for the Millennium" was made possible through the support of:

? Mayor Daniel Pierce and the members of the Highland Park City Council

? The Friends of the Highland Park Public Library

? The Irene and Francis Sheahen Foundation

A special note of appreciation is due to City Councilman Michael Belsky for suggesting the project to the Library and for supporting "Books That Matter" from start to finish.

The titles in *Books That Matter: A List for the Millennium* were nominated by the reading community in Highland Park and these selections do not necessarily reflect the views of the Highland Park Public Library, its staff or the Library Board of Trustees.

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