



# Sparks from Our 2006 MVP Winners



**H**ave you ever tried to start a fire by rubbing two sticks together? Making fire this way is as likely as a children's librarian *not* taking free posters at a library conference. Have you spent hours planning a teen program only to end up with low participation? Like coaxing a flame from two sticks, it's a lot of effort for disappointing results. To start any fire—or a first-rate teen program—you need a spark.

The following sparks from VOYA's 2006 Most Valuable Programs (MVPs) will ignite a flame of excitement in your teens. VOYA editor Cathi Dunn MacRae and Advisory Board members Tracey Firestone, Diane Tuccillo, and I selected these winners to exemplify VOYA's guiding principles and also provide incendiary examples for you. A well-built fire requires not only the spark to get it started, but fuel to keep it alive. All MVP Winners use teen participation and enthusiasm as the fuel. Keep reading to discover what makes each program worthy of the lofty MVP title—and catch the sparks.

## GOCKS! GOTH SOCK PUPPETS: MOST VALUABLE CREATIVE PROGRAM

### Riverton Public Library, Riverton, Utah

Who expects sparks to fly when a librarian goofs off with socks? During a retreat where librarians learned to make sock puppets, Senior Librarian/Young Adult Specialist Patricia Foster turned her puppet into a Goth by adding a tongue stud. Thus was born the Gock! In no time, a program was crafted in which teens created their own Gocks, introduced in my June 2006 column. The teens' imaginations, enthusiasm, and love of putting safety-pin faces on socks fueled an enjoyable twist on a traditional craft program. Get the scoop on Gock-making on page 303.

## ANIME PROM: MOST VALUABLE POP CULTURE PROGRAM

### Tecumseh District Library, Tecumseh, Michigan

Anime Prom was cited in my August 2006 column because of its unique spin on the classic high school prom. Teen Services Librarian Anne Keller and the library's teen Anime Club members met for more than a month to plan a combination of prom traditions with all that is fun about anime. The event included a dance with a deejay, a raffle, prom photos, a video game tournament, the crowning of Kings and Queens, and food—all provided by donations and volunteers! When Keller and the teens synthesized these two ideas, their spark formed a winning program. See complete details on page 304.

## THURSDAY AFTERNOON FIGHTS: MOST VALUABLE DISCUSSION PROGRAM

### Niles Public Library District, Niles, Illinois

Book discussion groups? Been there, read that. How about a discussion group in which teens are given free rein to debate their choice of issues that most affect their lives? Now imagine a group of teens who meet on the third Thursday of every month to argue about school dress codes, abortion, pornography, or war. Add Young Adult Librarian Kate Wolicki, who listens without judging and sensitively facilitates a civilized discussion, and you have one of the most innovative programs that I've read about all year. It only costs about \$10 per debate—cheaper than most arguments in Washington, D.C. Learn the secrets of facilitating with finesse on page 306.

## VOTE! IT DOES A NATION GOOD: MOST VALUABLE VOLUNTEER/ACTIVISM PROGRAM

### Wilmington Memorial Library, Wilmington, Massachusetts

How do you inspire teens to vote when it doesn't involve a singer on *American Idol*? Teen Services Librarian Nathalie Harty collaborated with community partners including the League of Women Voters, schools, author Janet Tashjian, and State Representative Jim Miceli to plan seven events to help teens take an active role in the democratic process. Mentioned in my June 2006 column as a discussion program, this well-organized series included not only book discussions but also an author visit, writing and art contests, a mock election, and a post-election party. And it encouraged teens turning eighteen to register to vote in the Presidential election. The community members, librarians, and teens involved in this winner caused a spark that could light up any monument in our nation's capital. Capture that spark to prepare your teens for the 2008 election on page 310.

## THE Most Valuable Program of 2006:

### WE EMPOWER TEENS @ OCEAN COUNTY LIBRARY

#### Ocean County Library, Toms River, New Jersey

This year's top winner is an awesome example of how one library system has changed the way they support and interact with teens. Beyond efforts to entice teens to use the library for activities other than homework and cruising the Internet, this program re-envisioned the entire process of working with teens. Teen Services Coordinator Judy Macaluso has led a movement that involves teens with their community in developing ongoing services in which "teen participation and teen empowerment are the clearly visible center." VOYA's overall MVP provides not just a spark but a fireworks spectacular that will serve as a model for years to come. Find Macaluso's complete description in her August 2006 feature article (pages 214-18) as well as the VOYA editor's analysis in the current issue on page 310.

## STARTING YOUR OWN FIRE

May sparks from the 2006 MVPs inspire you to build upon your past successes (and failures) to create future winning programs. For fuel to sustain your fire, welcome the ideas and talents of the teens with whom you work. When you have cultivated a roaring flame, submit your program to be considered for next year's awards or a future *Get With the Program* column. Use the online submission link at the top of VOYA's home page at <http://www.voya.com>. Next year's MVP submissions are due by **May 15, 2007**. As the once great philosopher Jimi Hendrix stated, "Let me stand next to your fire."

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