



Segenat Messenger

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The Online Public Access Catalog, Another Dream Fulfilled



Enda Mehari, one of the library assistants has proven to be quite a perfectionist when it comes to

Through the efforts of many, the Segenat Children and Youth Library has a fully functional online public access catalog, despite the late start due to the fact that there was no electricity to the building until just prior to the dedication. The web interface is very professional looking, simple to use, and appealing. It will become an important tool for students to use in gaining access to the Segenat library collection and help them achieve the valuable library skills they will need when they attend Mekelle University, Addis Ababa University or one of the many other institutions of higher education in Ethiopia that have online library catalogs.

KOHA software was chosen for this interface because it is freely downloadable from the Internet. It was chosen for

its ease of use and the capability of handling different scripts, including Amharic and Tigrigna. It is currently in use at Addis Ababa University.

The Segenat relied heavily on current Peace Corps Volunteers, Nick Strnad and Richard Gelicame, in putting the pre-loaded software onto the network. The online catalog is now accessible from any of four computers in the computer lab, the registration desk, and wireless at the reference desk.

But as all librarians know, a major challenge is in entering all of the cataloging data and the Segenat does not yet have access to the Internet, staff cannot avail themselves of downloading re-

cords from another source. Based on advice of public librarians abroad, we determined the minimum amount of information that should be included in the records, drew up instructions, tested the instructions and began training.

Two of the library assistants who have computer and typing skills, Enda Mehari and Ftaw Alemahou, gravitated toward this project and have overcome tremendous obstacles of third language learners, two of which are in a different script. They are now learning a fourth language: cataloging with all of its fields and indicators and punctuation and are doing a spectacular job. They proof each other's work so there is a measure of quality control.



In addition to her duties registering children, greeting all visitors, and maintaining statistics, Ftaw Alemahou also has become quite skilled at entering cataloging data into the online public access catalog.

Special points of interest:

- Online catalog activated
- Children lined up at the door
- Record number of visits
- Distinguished visitors

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Computer Classes Begin



One of our young visitors.

“THE COMPUTER LAB WAS LARGELY FUNDED THROUGH A PEACE CORPS PARTNERSHIP GRANT SPONSORED BY CURRENT U.S. PEACE CORPS VOLUNTEERS IN MEKELLE”

We have electricity. We have computers. We have a network. We have knowledgeable instructors. Now it is time to put all of these parts together and begin teaching computer classes. Less than an hour after we put out sign-up sheets, the spots were taken and a waiting list begun. Two classes of ten children each began formal instruction this week.

The classes began with a general overview of computers and computing and will continue with a basic foundation in Microsoft Office Word and Excel. Later the children will be introduced to the Internet and cover aspects of email and web browsing as well as how to search the Segenat Library online catalog. A total of twenty-four hours of instruction will be given to each class. The classes are very interactive, participatory and hands on. Computers, technology, and children seem to go hand in hand the world over.

The students are very happy and are very interested in

learning more about computers. We will be investigating other computer course options and providing additional classes because there is a definite need and great interest.

The computer lab was largely funded through a Peace Corps Partnership Grant sponsored by current U.S. Peace Corps Volunteers in Mekelle: Nicholas Strnad, Shelley McCreery, and Danielle Hoekwater. Current Volunteer, Rich Gelicame, flew in from the southern region and lent his great computer expertise in setting up the net-

work. Janet Lee, a Returned Peace Corps Volunteer/Ethiopia will donate a CDMA, a mobile device for accessing the Internet, to the library when she departs for the U.S. at the end of the month. Rich has already added a connection for the CDMA to the network so that it will merely be plug and play when she leaves. Minutes for the CDMA will need to be added once we find a funding source to purchase the additional time. \$100 Birr (approximately \$7.00 US) will provide about twelve hours of access to the Internet.



Ato Fitsum from the Mekelle Youth Center instructs the children on the parts of a computer and its operations.

Fulbright Scholar Visits Segenat

Dr. Kathleen Malu, a Fulbright Scholar, was so impressed with her tour of the Segenat Children and Youth Library that she scheduled her seminar students from Mekelle University to spend an afternoon taking advantage of the wealth of resources available to students at the library. Dr. Malu, an Associate Professor at William Paterson University

(Wayne, NJ) is currently a Fulbright Scholar at Kigali Institute of Education in Kigali, Rwanda where she teaches literature in English. She is at Mekelle University at the invitation of Mekelle University President, Professor Mitiku Haile, as part of the Fulbright Regional Sharing Program to conduct a weeklong seminar on children and young adult literature in

the post graduate literature program. Thirty-five graduate students were able to meet with Ato Yohannes Gebregeorgis, take a tour of the library, examine resources, and observe young students reading and using library materials. All of the students expressed their greatest appreciation to Ato Yohannes for bringing such a fine resource to the community.



Yohannes Gebregeorgis receives a collection of children's books from Dr. Kathleen Malu.

Myliham Elementary School: Promises Kept

Many of us have fond childhood memories of our early school years, be it a favorite teacher, a special class, sports, or music. But too few of us take the time to say "Thank you" to those who made a difference to us or to help the next generation to have similar joy or memories. Not so, for Tsehaye Zemenfes and Hideat Alene, who attended Myliham Elementary School in Mekelle and whose paths crossed while both were in the U.S., Tsehaye now in DC and Hideat now in Seattle. They spoke to each other often of how they could give back to the school that had given them so much in their early years. A library seemed like an ideal solution, but was such a project within their reach? Tsehaye was familiar with the work of Ato Yohannes Gebregeorgis and made a point of attending one of his presentations while Yohannes was in DC.

Like many of the younger generation, Tsehaye and Hideat took advantage of social media such as Facebook and also sent out a wide-spread email campaign

using firstgiving.org as a recipient for donations. In their email to friends Tsehaye states: "After coming to the United States for educational opportunities, I have never forgotten the rich and wonderful memories and it always stuck with me that one day I would want to give back to my beloved elementary school....We are now partnering up with [Ato Yohannes] to realize our dream, to sponsor a library in our beloved Myliham Elementary. From Mr. Yohannes, who was gracious enough to visit our school this year, we learned that the school has a room that can be used as a library and that the school has a person who will be trained as a librarian....Hideat and I have been very fortunate to have educational resources in our lives and we are determined to give the same opportunity to the students of Myliham Elementary School."

Myliham is on the outskirts of town, nestled in the foothills of the nearby mountains. From a single vantage point, one can view the rising hills or look down into the city

proper. Like everywhere in Tigray, it is both rocky and hilly. There many buildings in the compound housing a total of 15 classrooms. Along one side of the campus is an expansive *tef* field, the local grain for making *injera*, the staple bread.

The library occupies a single classroom and holds shelving, tables and chairs and other specialized furniture. Solid wood shelves line the perimeter of the room and are filled with many books of all types, but the students seemed to gravitate toward the titles that were in Amharic or Tigrigna.

Twenty-five teachers move from classroom to classroom throughout the day. Like most schools in Ethiopia, it has two shifts to accommodate the growing number of children and lack of schools and classroom space. It is a medium-sized school for Ethiopia, with only about 750 total students (320 boys and 430 girls).

It is no wonder that Tsehaye and Hideat have such warm memories of their beloved school.



Two girls select a book to read.

"TOO FEW OF US TAKE THE TIME TO SAY 'THANK YOU' TO THOSE WHO MADE A DIFFERENCE TO US OR TO HELP THE NEXT GENERATION TO HAVE SIMILAR JOY OR MEMORIES."

"American Libraries" Editor Visits The Segenat

The American Library Association has been a proven supporter of libraries of all types including schools, public, academic and special. This support has not been restricted to within the confines of its own national boundaries, but has been a voice for collaboration and cooperation of all libraries

worldwide.

Yohannes Gebregeorgis has received ongoing support from the American Library Association and it was with great honor that we welcome Leonard Kniffel, editor of *American Libraries* to the dedication of the Segenat Children and Youth Library.

Please read his account of this powerful experience in the article entitled, "New Youth Library in Ethiopia Makes Impossible Dream Reality"

<http://americanlibrariesmagazine.org/news/08232010/new-youth-library-ethiopia-makes-impossible-dream-reality>

Library hours:
Monday through
Saturday:
8 a.m. to 12:00 p.m.
2:00 p.m. to 5:30
p.m.

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Donations may be sent to:
Tigray Development Association
Library and Literacy Development Project
P.O. Box 73295
Washington, D.C. 20056-3295

The Segenat Children and Youth Library is a modern, full-service library serving the information needs of the children and youth in Mekelle, Tigray Region, Ethiopia and its environs. The 20,000 volume library has a networked computer lab with limited internet access, an online catalog, reference services, and a variety of clubs and other programming. It is open 48 hours per week, Monday through Saturday.

<https://www.facebook.com/#!/pages/Segenat-Children-and-Youth-Library/161388783881687>

When the Extraordinary Becomes Ordinary



Meheret, Rahel, and Azeb share a book in the reading nook.



Regat, Lula, and Azeb practice their writing skills on an erasable activity

After all of the excitement and fanfare of the dedication and inauguration of the Segenat Children and Youth Library, life has become rather routine. Saturday is film day, and we typically have 50 children in attendance. One would think that all of the children would be in the media room and not reading books, but lo and behold, a quick count found 45 kids spread throughout the library proper reading and writing in their exercise books. Because the library books cannot be checked out, the children meticulously copy favorite passages or vocabulary into these exercise books.

A young father had his two sons in tow and was showing them the various collections in the library: English fiction and

non-fiction, Amharic, and Tigrigna. They live with their mother in distant Adwa, and he wanted to make sure that their two weeks with him were productive. A police officer has been stopping by with his son and encouraging him to use the library as well.

Meheret reads a couple of books to a small group of spellbound children. The Reading Nook has become a favorite spot in the library for those six and under.

The library is frequently filled to capacity and there is always a buzz of excitement as the children go to the shelves, retrieve a book, and sit quietly at a table to read.

The City of Mekelle has offered us three additional buildings in which to build libraries and I know of one donor who is ready and will-

ing to help. We have been approached by other municipalities across Ethiopia and in due time, these, too, could become reality.

At the end of the day, a small group of children is brought into the Reading Nook and a story called "Let's Feel the Rhythm" is read and pantomimed. The kids snap their fingers, slap their knees, stomp their feet, and swing their hips. A few minutes later, I see them at the end of the boulevard in front of the library. They wave to us as they walk away. "Snap! Snap!" "Slap! Slap!" "Stomp! Stomp!" "Swing! Swing!"