Reference as Programming

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Become a local in under an hour

everything you need to know about your new city

(including all the local spiders)

Moving into a new community can have a steep learning curve. Even moving within the same state one finds there is so much local knowledge that is not collected in any one place but must be learned piecemeal over time. Moving across the country or internationally just compounds the amount of local information one needs. I remember moving to Nashville, TN and mentioning to a new friend that I was getting excited by the cooler weather and looking forward to wearing pants. My friend casually offered “Remember to shake out all your pants that have been hanging in the closet because that is where brown recluse spiders like to hang out. They will bite you when you pull your pants on.” This is the type of incidental information that would be lifesaving to newcomers. The program I would offer is called “Become a local in under an hour - everything you need to know about your new city (including all the local spiders)”. The program would first offer a hearty welcome, give a brief introduction to the library, and then cover five major areas of local information, local city offerings, dangerous critters and what to do, natural disasters, local food traditions or restaurants, and finally local parks, museums, and natural offerings.

This program should start off with a very enthusiastic welcome to any newcomer to the area. Reassure the participants that a welcome booklet with all the information covered today is in front of them. First, start by introducing the library and highlighting two or three programs on offer. This should be very brief, but you want to remind everyone that the library is the number

one source for information. Also, spotlight a program for families with children, something for older adults, and just one general offering that is popular or critical for newcomers. For example, you might remind everyone that the library offers meeting rooms for anyone to reserve, storytimes for children every weekend, and a new class about online banking for adults.

Next, we would want to orient them to the local city and again choose three local offerings to highlight. The key would be to introduce offerings that are special for your city and make sure to offer some local tips too. Your city may have a fantastic July 4th parade every year. You need to make it welcoming by reminding everyone they need to know to put their blanket out the night before to reserve a spot or section their spot off with tape and sidewalk chalk. It is these little tips that make someone feel in the know and more welcome in the community. There might be a few local streets that really go all out decorating with holiday lights or have a haunted house on Halloween that you can share. Living in Chicago, the annual air show is not to be missed! Every community has something special to share.

At this point it is important to cover some of the more dangerous critters and creatures we live side by side with. The goal is not to cause undue panic, but to inform new residents of common sense safety that they might not be aware of having grown up elsewhere. We would give a quick tip sheet with what wild creatures to look out for and a reminder of what to do if you find yourself confronted with one. For example, how do I discourage brown recluse spiders from taking residence in my home. If I find a brown recluse spider, what do I do? A second sheet would also detail some of the local plant life that can be of issue like poison ivy or poison oak. When we lived in Geneva, Switzerland, it was customary to use public showers after going

to any local lake in order to wash off any water fleas. This would be a great item to include on a tip sheet about local life.

This second section on local natural disasters and what to do should also be treated with the same sense of calm as the previous section. Tornadoes, wildfires, earthquakes, hurricanes, or tsunamis - mother nature can sneak up on one not prepared. Quickly going over the most necessary items to have prepared in advance and the tips for when one encounters one of these disasters are important. Information on only those most likely to happen in your specific local can be included in the handout.

The next section is meant to inspire some fun! Everyone loves some free food! Every community has a few local specialty restaurants or food that can be shared. This would be a great place to partner with some restaurants or food vendors and have them offer some samples of their fares. Moving to California I discovered Sees Candy made chocolate candies and was a special treat. Wouldn't it be fun to buy a box of candy to share amongst the participants? There was a bakery near where I lived in Michigan that made famous almond Windmill cookies. A couple packages of these cookies would serve as a refreshment and as an introduction to local fare. Maybe there is a particularly good coffee shop that can be asked to donate an urn of coffee for the event? The handout would highlight a few local specialties and some restaurants too. For bigger cities, different restaurants could be featured on a rotating schedule. Small local businesses could also be featured at this time. Guidelines would need to be set to define what constitutes 'small' and 'local' with care taken for no sales pitches.

Finally, the program would close with a highlight of some local parks, museums, or events. The key here is to again make new residents aware of some places to visit that are a touch

further afield. There might be a wonderful nature preserve in the next town over, hiking trails within an hour's drive, or an amazing concert venue that can't be missed. In the winemaking area around Geneva, Switzerland each winery opened up their property for 'cave ouvert' which included wine, food, and music. It took two years before we discovered this amazing tradition and this would be perfect to include in your presentation. Maybe there are ski resorts close by that many in the community take advantage of with an annual used ski sale every summer you can share. Ask new staff their impression of what is unique to the area and include this. For example, moving into California I learned that summer cabana swim team is very popular for children. Anyone growing up in California may not realize that this is a regional sport, but newcomers will have noticed this.

It is important to close the program on an upbeat note with a feeling that this community has a lot to offer. The end of the program is also the time to open up the floor to questions. It would be ideal to note what types of questions are common so that the presentation could be adjusted to include these over time.

The goal of the program is to genuinely welcome new residents and integrate them into the community. This program would be a huge benefit for all new residents. Local community businesses and restaurants will also appreciate the free advertising. The library is increasingly becoming the touchpoint for a community and it makes sense for the library to connect new residents with the local information that is only available by word of mouth.

The target audience for this program would be any new resident in the community. Gathering the necessary information about the local community would initially be done by the librarian on staff, but once the program essentials are developed it can be delivered by any

welcoming individual. For a program like this to achieve its goal the presenter delivering the program needs to be very outgoing, personable, and have vast local knowledge they are excited to share.

Now more than ever we live in places we were not born into with no family nearby. Social isolation is a serious community problem that affects many adults. The library is uniquely situated to be an information resource for new residents. When patrons open a new library card, the librarian is in the perfect position to ask if the patron is new to the community and to suggest this program. Even if the program is months away, the librarian can still welcome the patron and offer the handout. Feeling like one belongs to a community starts with all that nuanced insider information.

The program should be offered as frequently as needed for the community. In a fairly stable community the program may be offered yearly at the start of a new school year when many new families will have just moved. For a higher turnover area, this program can be offered every two or three months. An evening time during the week would work best and only an hour is needed to cover the material.

After the initial investment of time needed to gather the community information and create a presentation and handout, the time commitment is minimal. Care should be taken to double check the presentation before each offering just in case something has unexpectedly changed. A small ongoing budget is needed for printing the handout, advertising posters, and some snacks and refreshments. The city might even be persuaded to cover some of these costs. Some time would need to be invested to arrange any of the local restaurant participation. The initial development of the program would necessitate phoning several restaurants and speaking

with their management to secure a commitment. This could be as simple as asking for a donation of chips and salsa to serve 20 from the great local mexican place or securing two loaves of bread from the local bakery. After the initial development of the relationship, a phone call or two a week before the program would be needed.

The program should be offered in the library community meeting room. We want to introduce any new residents to the ultimate information source - the library! Some food will be served so care should be taken to find a room where this is acceptable. Depending on the size of the community and rate of turnover, the expected turnout for this event would be around 15 patrons. If one sees a large turnout, then more frequent offerings should be made. Assessment of the effectiveness of the presentation is difficult. The number of participants and the length that participants stay to ask questions can be used to gage success. Participant names and emails should be taken down so that a followup survey can ask for feedback to better improve the program. The survey should be sent at around 3 months after the program.

Advertising this program to new residents is critical. As stated earlier, librarians can mention this ongoing program when new members sign up for library cards. Sending a separate advert to new residents with city information is also another way to advertise along with asking the local DMV to post signs or hand out flyers with new driver's license registrations. The library is uniquely positioned to help new residents with their local information needs. Providing a warm and welcoming introduction to the community is an invaluable service.