

# Filed under acceptance

Oak Park library a pioneer in stocking and organizing transgender titles

By **NICHOLAS MORONI**  
Contributing Reporter

Talk of Oak Park's nod to the needs of transgender people often turns to Transformations, a shop at the center of town that catered for almost a decade and a half to larger women and cross-dressers. Less than two years after Transformations closed in 2005, another resource for the transgender community surfaced in the village.

It's half a block from 146 N. Oak Park Ave., where Transformations prominently was. But without camp or a storefront, the Transgender Resource Collection of the Oak Park Public Library can go practically unnoticed. The nearly 200 titles in a section devoted solely to transgender material make Oak Park's library the first in the U.S. to have such a specific collection.

In most public libraries, the few transgender titles are nestled among works in a larger, general LGBT section. At Oak Park library's main branch, the general category is transgender. In that category, you'll find such subcategories as Historical, Cultural and Global Views; Performing Arts and the Media; General Works; Memoirs and Personal Stories; and Medical and Legal Concerns.

The section came together in 2007 with help from a federal grant that the Oak Park Library Board of Trustees opted to apply for the year before after noting demand

## Not just for Oak Parkers

*Anyone with an Illinois public library card can check out books, movies and periodicals in this collection.*

### Transgender Resource Collection

- Main branch, Oak Park Public Library
- 834 Lake, Oak Park
- 9 a.m. to 9 p.m. Monday-Thursday; 9 a.m. to 6 p.m. Friday; 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Saturday; 1 to 6 p.m. Sunday
- 708-697-6952
- [www.oppl.org/media/trc.htm](http://www.oppl.org/media/trc.htm)

**E-mail:** [collections@oppl.org](mailto:collections@oppl.org)

**Second floor:** Movies

**Third floor:** Books and periodicals

for such specialty material.

The \$3,000 grant that the Oak Park library put toward most of the nonfiction titles in its collection was made possible by the Library Services and Technology Act, a 1996 update by Congress to the Library Services and Construction Act of 1964. Under this act, federal money from the Institute of Museum and

Library Services goes to a state library administrative agency, which in Illinois is a division of the Office of Secretary of State.

"I tried to buy everything I could — every title that was in print and available," says Bleue Benton, the library's collection development manager and author of the grant application. The collection started with nonfiction books, manuscripts and DVDs covering medical information, legal concerns and social issues for transgender people, their friends, employers and professionals whose services they would need to seek.

Benton consulted with professors, colleagues, authors, transgender groups, and librarians who manage other sizable LGBT collections. She has been adding fiction titles and films with the library's own resources.

"One of our main missions as a library, because Oak Park is such a diverse community, is to reflect that," says Leigh Gavin, assistant manager of Adult and Teen Services at Oak Park Public Library. "There is a variety of material, not just for people who are transgender, but also for people who are family members."

One person the Oak Park Public Library reached was Nick Heap, a transgendered person in the village. "I was really glad to help," says Heap, who had more than a list of titles and authors on hand from his personal research. Heap had a sincere appreciation for the effort.

"There is so little real under-



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**SPECIFIC:** Leigh Gavin of Oak Park, assistant manager of Adult and Teen Services for Oak Park Public Library, shows a title in the Transgender Resource Collection's subcategory of Performing Arts and the Media.

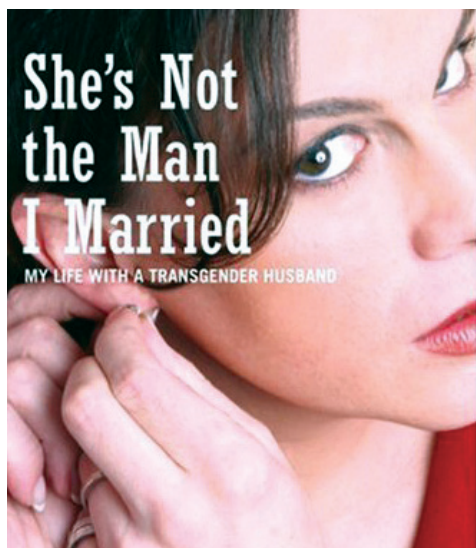
standing on this subject — and lack of understanding breeds fear and distrust.

"Progress is welcome," Heap says. "They were happy to listen to whatever I was able to share on the subject. I know that putting a face and a name to a previously intangible concept really helps people."

With coaching from Heap and others, the library coupled the education and sensitivity that this section represents with awareness workshops

for staff members. "These sessions were followed up with departmental meetings using scenarios designed to encourage deeper conversation about potential interactions in the library setting," Benton said.

Restrooms options weren't overlooked. A restroom that was once designated for use only by people with physical disabilities was made available to anyone who may not be comfortable using a gender-specific room.



## Book titles in the transgender collection

### Performing Arts and the Media

*Disciplining Gender: Rhetorics of Sex Identity in Contemporary U.S. Culture*

*Drag: A History of Female Impersonation in the Performing Arts*

*Vested Interests: Cross-Dressing and Cultural Anxiety*

### General Works

*Invisible Lives: The Erasure of Transsexual and Transgendered People*

*Normal: Transsexual CEOs, Cross-Dressing Cops, and Hermaphrodites with Attitude*

*True Selves: Understanding Transsexualism — for Families, Friends, Co-workers, and Helping Professionals*

### Memoirs and Personal Stories

*The First Man-Made Man: the Story of Two Sex Changes, One Love Affair; and a*

*Twentieth Century Medical Revolution*

*She's Not the Man I Married: My Life with a Transgender Husband*

*Transparent: Love, Family, and Living the T with Transgender Teenagers*

### Medical and Legal Concerns

*Gender Loving Care: A Guide to Counseling Gender-Variant Clients*

*Transgender Emergence: Therapeutic Guidelines for Working with Gender-Variant*

*People and Their Families Transgender Rights*

### Historical, Cultural and Global Views

*Neither Man nor Woman: The Hijras of India*  
*The Spirit and the Flesh: Sexual Diversity in American Indian Culture*

*Toms and Dees: Transgender Identity and Female Same-Sex Relationships in Thailand*