

Library chief grew up among shelves

By Lisa R. Omphroy
Staff Writer

Mario Gonzalez says one of the best parts of being the new director of Greenwich Library is realizing how deeply the people of the town care about their facility.

"It's heartening to see how much the community loves the library, and it makes my job a lot easier," said the 47-year-old who took the helm at the library in September. "Being part of a community that appreciates, understands and supports the library is a wonderful thing to see."

Gonzalez, a New York City resident, comes to Greenwich most recently from the Brooklyn Public Library, where he was director of programs and special services. He was chosen to head the Greenwich Library system after a year-

long search by the Trustee's Search Committee and the town's Human Resources Department. He will be paid an annual salary of \$92,000.

During his three years in Brooklyn, Gonzalez oversaw a wide range of departments and initiatives, including literacy programs, Service to the Aging and CLASP – a partnership between libraries and schools that binds parents, teachers and students together in the joys of reading. The Brooklyn Public Library has a central library, a business library and 58 branches.

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Bob Luckey Jr./Staff photo

Mario Gonzalez, the new director of Greenwich Library, stands on the stairway of the renovated building Tuesday.



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Gonzalez also oversaw administration of the 34 branches of the Houston Public Library and worked at the New York Public Library for 25 years in a variety of capacities. The last job he held there was coordinator for services to people with disabilities.

He holds a master's degree in library science that he earned in 1978 at the Pratt Institute in Brooklyn.

As director of Greenwich Library, Gonzalez will oversee operation of the Main Library on West Putnam Avenue, Cos Cob Library on East Putnam Avenue and Byram Shubert Library on Mead Avenue. The system also has a bookmobile.

Perrott Memorial Library on Sound Beach Avenue in Old Greenwich is not part of the system, but Gonzalez says he is in the process of reaching out to that library and to others statewide to see how they can all work together.

"We're all one family here," he said.

Gonzalez is particularly proud that Greenwich Library was ranked the best public library in Connecticut serving a population between 50,000 to 99,999 by Hennen's American Public Library Rating Index in the January issue of American Libraries Magazine, a publication of the American Library Association. The study ranked more than 7,000 libraries throughout the country in four broad

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population categories.

He says he also is very pleased to have such a knowledgeable and experienced staff. Gonzalez oversees about 56 full-time staff members along with a cadre of part-time workers and volunteers.

"There is a very high caliber of staff that works here – a very large pool of talent," he said. "We will work togeth-

er in looking at what services we are providing now and figuring out what the future of those services should be."

In addition, Gonzalez is busy working with The Friends of the Greenwich Library – a group he refers to as "phenomenal" – and with the library's board of trustees. Gonzalez called the trustees a "group of dedicated citizens who have a great deal of commitment to the library."

Gonzalez says he can relate to the special feeling people get from libraries.

A native of Cuba, Gonzalez says he felt so at home among the stacks at the New York Public Library while growing up that as soon as he was old enough, he went right out and got his

working papers so he could work there.

By the time he was 18, he said he knew that a life of working in library service awaited him.

Today, Gonzalez says he looks forward to seeing Greenwich Library stay abreast of trends to become a "leader in technology."

Right now, priorities include working on the library's budget and overseeing the completion of ongoing construction at the library. The construction project is expected to be completed sometime next spring, he said.

"I feel very happy and very excited about being here," he said.