Inside this Issue:

Rural Libraries: A Story of Survival... 5
Whitman County Farmers Reap Benefits of Library Services... 16
My Mom, the Librarian... 29
HERE’S A CRITICAL FACT about library service in Washington: In this state, all public library funding is local funding. Without local community support, there is no public library service – whether along the I-5 corridor, in the Spokane region, in smaller cities such as Richland, or in the vast and sometimes isolated rural regions and small towns comprising much of Washington’s geographic area.

This fact – the requirement of local support for all public libraries – must, I believe, shape many elements of the persistent agenda of the Washington library community:

• to promote appreciation for the idea of libraries, whether school, public, community college, academic, or special, and to develop understanding of the educational and recreational value libraries bring to communities, schools, and organizations;
• to promote funding for adequate library service in every community, in all regions of the state; and,
• to build connections among libraries and library people, in order to share expertise, reduce fragmentation and isolation, and make best use of resources in all regions, whether densely or sparsely populated, prosperous or struggling.

Rural regions in Washington may be served by library districts covering adjacent urban and rural areas, by libraries in small municipalities, or by library districts explicitly identified as “rural.” Some rural areas, alas, are not served at all – yet. Developing local support to establish library service in previously library-less communities, though strenuous, is possible and exciting. This important issue of Alki, with its portrayals of varied rural libraries, demonstrates the benefits of library service for rural regions, and reveals some of the creative thinking taking place.

Two new appointments: Margaret Thomas and Lisa Hill

This is the first issue created under the direction of new Alki Editor Margaret Thomas. Margaret, a reference librarian with a journalism background, served as assistant editor last year. Congratulations, Margaret! We look forward to more of your work.

Lisa Hill recently became the Washington Library Association’s new webmaster. Lisa is already exploring possible new developments, including some “members only” features many of you have wanted. Thank you, Lisa, for undertaking the care and feeding of our Web site.

Carolyne Myall, Head of Library Collection Services at Eastern Washington University, is president of WLA. Please send her your ideas for the association at cmyall@mail.ewu.edu

Another great WALE conference

The Washington Association of Library Employees held its 2006 conference in Bellingham. The conference was wonderful, with good programs, stimulating conversations, strong positive energy – and, of course, the frequent prize-giving that WALE has raised to an art form!

Thank you to WALE Conference Chair Heidi Chittim, WALE Chair Katie Cargill, and all the members of the conference committee for their leadership in creating this valuable event. And thank you to the WLA members who gave excellent presentations at the conference, and who provided support for the conference in many ways.

A double WLFFTA Friends and Foundations Forum

In 2006, for the first time, WLFFTA added “Foundations” to its Friends forums and offered the event at two sites, Spokane and Issaquah. The Eastside-Westside innovation made attendance more convenient for a lot of us. There were pertinent sessions, lots of goodies, and opportunities to network with other library people. Thank you to Patience Rogge, Carol Schuyler, Kristy Coomes, and Jennifer Wiseman for organizing and publicizing Friends Forum. Thank you, Spokane County Library District and King County Library System, for hosting.

Recently the Grassroots! interest group for promoting library advocacy merged with Up Front on page 4
**Table of Contents**

- **From the Editor** ................................................................. 4
- **Rural Libraries: A Story of Survival** ................................. 5  
  By Micheal Wood
- **Shared Spaces** .................................................................. 9  
  By Theresa Kappus
- **The Orcas Island Story: Volunteers, Tradition and a Guy from the Desert** ................................................................. 11  
  By Brian Soneda
- **Washington Idaho Network Helps Rural Libraries Automate** ................................................................. 13  
  By Konny Thompson
- **Whitman County Farmers Reap Benefits of Library Services** ................................................................. 16  
  By Sabrina Jones
- **Confessions of a Lone Librarian** ......................................... 19  
  By Lynn Barnes
- **WLA Communiqué** .......................................................... 20
- **Who's on First? Net Neutrality: Why Librarians Should Care** ................................................................. 22  
  By Elena Bianco
- **Tribal Libraries Preserve Native American Heritage** ............ 24  
  By Rayette Sterling
- **Roslyn Library Stretches to Serve a Changing Community** ................................................................. 26  
  By Erin Krake
- **National Conference Focuses on Rural Libraries** .................. 27  
  By Erin Krake
- **The Solinus Page:**  
  **My Mom, the Librarian:** Extending the Definition of Rural Library Service ................................................................. 29  
  By Angelina Benedetti
- **I'd Rather be Reading Those Amazing Librarians!** .................. 31  
  By David Wright

---

On the cover:  
Twelve-year-old Taylor takes a break to read *Boys' Life* at harvest time on his grandparents’ farm near St. John in Whitman County. His mother Sandy Martin snapped the cover shot and this one of her son.
AUDIO BOOKS from the library keep farmers company on the combine. When one town's economy withers, its library survives most of a year on donations alone. At another library, five dozen volunteers handle everything from landscaping to book selection.

These are among the stories in this issue – my first as the new editor of Alki. The theme is “Rural Libraries.” Whether nestled in the Palouse, perched in the Cascades, or secluded on a San Juan island, rural libraries have one thing in common: They do a lot with a little.

For the luxury of a library, rural residents share space. In Roslyn, children's programs take place in the City Council chambers beside an old potbellied stove. Metaline’s library users endure the drumbeat of music lessons upstairs. In Onion Creek, you can pick up milk and a book at the only store in town, which houses what is reportedly the smallest library in the country.

Fancy services and amenities are often out of reach. Patrons may not find wireless Internet or an espresso in Washington’s rural libraries; what they do find is the kind of service you get from people who are also neighbors and friends.

And remote no longer means removed. The best rural library workers seek out training and other opportunities for professional development. Small libraries collaborate and tap into the expertise and resources of their urban counterparts.

Keeping rural libraries open calls for ingenuity and creativity and you’ll find plenty of examples on these pages. If you like what you read (or you don’t) please write. Your letters make Alki more interesting.

Finally, I need to thank Cameron Johnson, who ably edited Alki for four years and oversaw its transition to the era of desktop publishing. During my apprenticeship, he and his wife and graphics assistant Laura McCarty were generous with their time, skills, insights and humor.

Laura danced a jig in my kitchen. I ate banana nut waffles in theirs. On one Alki production day in the Johnson-McCarty living room, the power went out three times in a half hour. When the files finally reassembled themselves, maybe it was relief or the lateness of the hour that inspired Cameron to mix up three of his signature “high hat” martinis. He wrote the recipe down on a card for me – just one of his many legacies.

Cheers.

Margaret Thomas

Margaret Thomas

Up Front

Continued from page 2

WLFFTA, which kept its initials but changed the meaning of its last A from “Association” to “Advocates,” to become Washington Library Friends, Foundations, Trustees & Advocates – a name change signifying its increased responsibility.

Mark your calendars for WLA Library Legislative Day 2007

And speaking of advocates: On Library Legislative Day, Washington libraries need advocates from every part of the state to travel to Olympia, visit their legislators and discuss the value of libraries and the impact of proposed legislation.

The coming legislative session’s LLD will be held on Thursday, March 8, 2007. Jennifer Wiseman and Jodi Reng are lead organizers. WLFFTA, with its new A-for-Advocacy, will also be active in planning and carrying out this event. We’ll have a fun, high-visibility day, with the opportunity to see our legislators in action. Steve Duncan, WLA legislative consultant, will provide a briefing; and we’ll hear from representatives of different parts of the library community about their legislative issues. Please join us in Olympia for LLD 2007. You can make a difference for Washington libraries!
The rural libraries in this state are doing poorly.
Take your pick – both are true.
Our state has snowy mountains, semi-arid plains, a Pacific Coast and an Inland Empire. But there is something it doesn’t have. Washington has no state tax support for libraries. Washington’s rural library story is one of dedication and human energy, of librarians with and without a degree who do what it takes to keep the doors open. Their motto very well might be, “To do more with less.”

My travels and interviews for this article have convinced me that our rural libraries are noble institutions, representative of the best aspects of a democratic society. By my admittedly intuitive reckoning of service provided per dollar, I would consider them in the micro-economic sense more successful than larger systems with substantial resources. But having a few books on the shelves is not enough to say that all is well.

Many rural libraries must face their patrons’ needs with pitifully low resources, inadequate staffing, and far too few hours. Some are open as few as eight hours a week. Let’s use for a quick example a typical small independent library serving people in Central Washington. It has one staff member. The operating budget for 2004 was $13,442. It can be even worse. There are micro-libraries that operate on $3,400 or $5,500 a year for actual examples. The question is obvious: How is it possible to offer library services without funding? The secrets of how rural libraries perform this monetary magic is soon to be revealed, but first we have to face:

Death, taxes and Eyman

Property taxes are a sensitive issue. Homeowners’ fears have been successfully exploited by Tim Eyman, the creator of state Initiative 747, which strictly limits annual increases in property taxes levied by a city, county, port or other taxing district. For many libraries, this means death to new services, or even to established ones. Although in June of this year the King County Superior Court at
last ruled I-747 unconstitutional, the damage done by this and similar slash-and-burn voter manipulation for private interest is now manifest. With a narrow, rural tax base, smaller communities are perhaps hit hardest, paying their police, fire department and parks from drastically reduced budgets. A cash shortage caused by I-747 recently forced the Pierce County Library System to go to the voters, appealing for help—not for more money, but just to restore lost funding.

A compelling survey by Evan Leach in his 2004 report on rural libraries identified funding as the biggest problem:

“Survey respondents identified a lack of money as their greatest challenge and computer training as their most pressing training need. Inadequate space was a challenge identified in the qualitative responses. ‘Basic library skills’ was identified as a pressing training need for both rural tribal and school libraries. Computer hardware, technical support and technical training were all identified as significant technological needs.”

In speaking to two experts on public library governance at the state library, Rand Simmons and Susan Barrett, I was amazed to learn there are libraries in this state that have somehow hung on to life on microscopically miniscule budgets of as little as a few thousand dollars a year. Often they are limited to strictly traditional services, such as providing popular reading and circulation because they really can’t afford much else. Many can’t afford to be open much. It’s all about cash. Money, however little there is, has to come from somewhere.

**Show me the money**

A library can be a facet of local government; these are called independent libraries, such as the public libraries in Ritzville, Pomeroy, Roslyn or Cle Elum. Rural libraries, if established under statute, are of two kinds: They can be a municipal library as a department of the city, or a library district; in which the local voters have agreed to tax themselves to support their service.

North Central Regional Library, for instance, is a five county district. Timberland Regional Library is another geographically expansive system. Typical costs? In November, the citizens of Arlington voted on an $8.1 million bond measure for a new library building, with property taxes to be collected over twenty years, beginning in 2007. At press time, the vote was too close to call; but if approved the measure would cost a modest $36 a year on a typical house valued at $200,000.

In the far southeast corner of the state, another example of a new rural library district can be found. There, citizens voted to establish the Columbia County Rural Library District. It is an uphill climb; these efforts don’t end with a “Yes” vote at the polls. Even after winning the vote in an election, money is not readily available for new districts; it can easily take a year and a half before the taxes collected are actually available for the library’s use.

Working within the constraints of constant struggles and serious limitations, it might go without saying that rural librarians are particularly dedicated people. In many cases they work for very little pay, doing all they can with what meager resources they have.

**Defending the castle**

Every year, Vicki Selander of the Castle Rock library has to go to the people. She must ask them to vote to fund her budget of about forty thousand dollars. That is for all expenses, to cover a year of operation. Such is her cheerful, driving energy and persuasive power that year after year, she somehow gets the money for her town library. To get her upbeat perspective on rural librarianship, I asked Selander to describe moments when she feels proud to be a librarian:

**SELANDER:** I am proud every time a patron’s face (especially a child’s) lights up when I tell them a new book by a favorite author has arrived. I am proud every time a first-time visitor looks around and says, “Wow, you have a really nice little library here!” I am proud every time a patron thanks me and says that I made a difference, in some way.

**ALKI:** Do you see any advantages to working in a small rural library?

**SELANDER:** In a rural library I get to know most of my patrons. I know their favorite kinds of books so I can inform them when new (or old) books might be appealing. The library is small enough that I can usually give very personal service, when it is needed. It is this country attitude and small town social style that I value most. This atmosphere makes it a joy to come to work in the library each day.
value the books and the people who love them most. The fact that anyone, no matter what income level can participate in the literary life of the culture, use the Internet to look for a job or send free email to friends and relatives.

ALKI: With the net loss of light manufacturing jobs in Castle Rock, how have you managed to stay open?

SELANDER: My community rallied around the library when its funding was eliminated from the city budget due to tax reductions. The Friends of the Library group kept the library operating for ten months that first year on donations alone. Each fall for five years the citizens of our town have voted an excess tax levy to fund the library’s budget and keep the doors open. The library’s book budget is funded by donations from the community’s social service organizations, churches and individuals. They have never let us down. Whenever a need is made known to the citizens, someone fulfills that need.

ALKI: If a magic genie were to grant Vicki Selander three wishes for the future of her library, what would they be?

SELANDER: 1. Endow the library with enough money to operate on the interest and not need tax money to maintain service.
2. Remodel our very old building or build a new one.
3. Increase the hours the library is open.

Reference on the beach

Most of our poorest counties are rural. Rural places have lost hundreds of thousands of processing and manufacturing jobs in the last decade. And yet in 2006, despite flat-lining local economies, rural libraries stubbornly cling to life. Some even find a way to thrive.

At the Ocean Park Timberland Library, on the sea swept Long Beach peninsula, in a modern well-used building serving a largely retired community of about 6,000, Librarian Iver Matheson spoke to me about an important role for the library in his breezy, seaside town. With overall population demographics graying because fewer living-wage rural jobs are available, the Ocean Park Library has adapted to serve more retired readers with diminishing eyesight. Responding to that need, the local Lions Club donated a magnifying screen reader to the library.

MATHESON: The Friends are one of the great joys of working here. They are highly motivated and organized, raising over $8,000 in a year. Just last weekend they held our annual book sale and raised $4,200; and that’s just phenomenal.

In a small community like Ocean Park, an active friends group gives a decisive boost. The funds raised have provided summer reading programs for local school children, and paid for eighteen annual periodical subscriptions. Ocean Park’s active citizen volunteers deliver materials to the homebound, and show enthusiasm in other ways.

MATHESON: One retired lady, very nice, came in and asked if she could straighten up the books, just to tidy up, line them up on the shelves. And she comes in every Tuesday.

I asked about the role of the library in this rural area.

MATHESON: There are not many jobs in this area. The library here provides reference, education; we are a social center, a focus of the community. There are people who come in every day. The library helps to keep people active. I think of it as a sort of gymnasium for the mind; a vital resource. I’ve heard people say that they have made the decision to retire here because it is such a good library.

I asked Matheson if the smallest rural libraries, with the greatest funding difficulties, were likely to disappear.

MATHESON: Just Disappear? No. I think that rural libraries are going to remain a vital part of the community. Providing Internet access has a major impact. As just one example, we now have “Ask a librarian” access via the Internet. New patrons get a library card and they are so amazed at the service that we can provide. They just love it.

This indefatigable rural librarian speculated that the best thing for struggling small libraries to do would be to become part of a larger district, pooling resources.

MATHESON: Rural libraries, if they are in a good system like Timberland can provide as good a service as any library in the country. I really believe that. I think that in terms of meeting our patron’s needs, we definitely can do it.

Timberland Regional Library serves five Western Washington counties through twenty-seven libraries and six cooperative library centers. Ocean Park may serve similar community needs, but its situation is vastly different from that of a small, independent library like Castle Rock. Districting means more funding, more materials available to patrons without interlibrary loans, and more computer technical help.

Consulting Buff ‘n Bette

Moving inland, I met with charismatic former Timberland administrator Bette Anderson, recently appointed director of the Renton Public Library, and asked for her thoughts about my interview at Ocean Park.

ANDERSON: It is my observation that rural communities value their libraries because those libraries exist, not because of the range of services those libraries are able (or unable) to provide. I have known small communities where the library was essentially just a reading room and yet people were passionate in their support of this “valuable community resource.” A community has a stronger sense of identity if the residents can
say they have a library. Aren’t we lucky to be associated with such a valued institution! At the moment I asked her to share her thoughts on rural libraries and virtual reference, the iconic Buff Hirko was just about to retire from her job as statewide virtual reference project coordinator.

BUFF: In small libraries with limited staff, hours and budgets, especially those serving rural and remote populations, virtual reference (both chat and email) is a vital service. The shared resources and expertise that collaborative reference service makes possible are invaluable. For Washington libraries using Question Point, cooperative coverage is available 24/7 at minimal cost. That means that access is available anytime, anywhere – office, home or on the road; morning or midnight. For example, legal questions can be referred to the Washington State Law Library or King County Law Library; government queries to the Washington State Library; gardening questions to the Miller Horticultural Library at UW [University of Washington]; health to the UW Health Sciences Library. All of these aspects of virtual reference greatly expand and enhance the abilities of small libraries to answer their customers’ needs.

ALKI: How do cash strapped rural libraries make it?

BUFF: The folks who work in rural libraries don’t leave their jobs at work. They interact with their patrons as neighbors, civic leaders, community volunteers, and friends; they see them in the grocery store, talk with them at PTA [Parent Teacher Association] and in church, and help them in emergencies. Those personal connections are what make small libraries vital, caring – and cared about – places.

Rand Simmons, program manager for library development at the Washington State Library, confirmed that the state library, in leveraging its status as a major customer, was able to negotiate free ProQuest databases for our smallest public and tribal libraries. However, sustaining public access computing is still difficult in a rural library without an adequate budget.

A way of life

This rural library story is a story about quiet heroes. If goodwill were dollars, they would all be rich – and perhaps in the most meaningful sense of the word, they are.

“Rural librarians are blessed to work in an atmosphere where people still hold a vital stake in the success of their community. If part of the community fails, it is a loss for everyone,” says Kristie Kirkpatrick, director of the Whitman County Rural Library District. “For that reason, rural communities really pull together to protect those services dear to their hearts. And of course, one of those most dear is the library. I wouldn’t trade my small-town job or way of life for any other.”

Bibliography


Advice to Small Libraries

From Kristie Kirkpatrick, Whitman County Rural Library District. From WebJunction http://webjunction.org/do/DisplayContent?id=1483

- Train, and require your staff to be friendly, caring, tech-savvy.
- Promote your library and staff using every means possible.
- Always plan! Technology plans, strategic plans, yearly goals.
- Earn the public’s trust.
- The library is an active part of the community.
- Participate in parades, events, celebrations, Chamber, etc.
- Encourage donations. ALWAYS thank people publicly, send personal thank you notes!
- Look for grants, partnerships and be frugal with finances.
- Friends of the Library a must!
- Love your customers and they’ll love you!
Shared Spaces

By Theresa Kappus

Metalines Community Library
Pend Oreille County Library District

Metalines Community Library shares space with a local theater group, which purchased the 1912 school building in the 1990s. The library occupies one end of the second floor (two classrooms and the hallway). The coat closets serve as computer and office space. The library pays “rent” by allowing the theater group to use its copier and fax machine.

It’s an active place. The building hosts wedding receptions, funerals, graduations and other events. There can be children singing, musicians playing and guns going off onstage, all within thirty feet of the library door. The activity brings extra people into the library, including tourists. The building’s many uses lead to a variety of sensory experiences: baking smells, hair permanent odors, paint fumes and dust from the ongoing renovation. Noises from karate classes or drum lessons overhead are to be expected. And the space comes with aesthetic requirements. Computers and furniture incompatible with the building’s vintage appearance must be kept out of sight from the hallway.

Fun fact: The Benning mail scene in Kevin Costner’s 1997 film The Postman was filmed in the theater space across from the library. During filming, the library’s doors stayed open so all could see and hear. At times, film security people blocked access to the front doors forcing patrons to enter through the fire exit. Costner himself walked through the library and several actors and crewmen got library cards and had their picture taken in the library.

Ilwaco Timberland Library
Timberland Regional Library District (Pacific County)

The Long Beach Peninsula is the local service area for the Ilwaco Library where, during the summer tourist season, the population can more than double. The library is located in the Ilwaco Community Building, a city-owned structure built in 1939 as a hospital. The library shares the building with the Pacific Aging Council Endeavors, a nonprofit senior services organization. Seniors attending meals at PACE have easy access to the library. On the downside, sharing space makes it difficult to decide who has responsibility for the public spaces when an emergency arises, such as overflowing toilets or parking lot problems (with overlapping hours, parking is an issue).

Currently, the library is working with PACE and the City of Ilwaco on plans to renovate the building. Included in the plans are a community meeting room, new restrooms, improved facilities for PACE, and an extra 1,000 square feet for the library.

Fun facts: The current library manager, Kristine Pointer, was born in the library, when it was a hospital. The children’s section of the library is in the old maternity ward. And the building is haunted! According to Northwest Paranormal (ghost hunters), there are several ghosts residing in the building. Pointer’s not too concerned. “Staff members have experiences that can only be described as unusual,” she says. “Frequently we hear people walking in the hallway outside the library but no one (that we can see) is out there. Strange noises during closed hours are also common. All-in-all entertaining and rarely scary.”

Darrington Public Library
Sno-Isle Libraries
(Snohomish County)

In 1989, the town of Darrington built a new library and city office space. Parking, entryway and public restrooms are shared. The library has a close working relationship with the city staff. Best of all, the mayor and

Theresa Kappus is the interlibrary loan and distance services librarian at Gonzaga University. Amanda McKeraghan, acting director of the Stevens County Rural Library District, contributed to this article.
city council members see firsthand how busy the library is. Nearly all of the roughly 3,000 residents in the library’s service area visit the building to get motor vehicle licenses, pay water bills, borrow a book, use the Internet or attend story time. Half of them have a library card.

Help is a few steps away when there are problems with lights or plumbing; and the city maintenance crew notices right away when the parking lot needs plowing. The janitorial staff consists of the town clerk and her husband. With the fire department and police station on the same block, library staff feels very secure at work.

Fun facts: Two library staffers and the town clerk were classmates and best friends in high school. One of the library board members working on a grant to expand the library is an architect who is married to a Darrington town councilman. Two other library board members are local school teachers, and the library branch manager, Linda McPherson, has served eighteen years on their school board.

Stevens County Rural Library District

Onion Creek Library Station
The Onion Creek Library Station is located in the Onion Creek Store, about twenty-five miles north of Colville, Washington. The small community of Onion Creek has a store and a K-8 school. When the library district was formed in 1998, the store offered a small corner for the library. The library station is open Wednesdays, when a staff person brings holds and boxes of materials to set up a mini display. The rest of the time, there is a paperback rack, a book drop and an honor system.

Hunters Community Library
The Hunters Community Library is in the Greenwood Park Grange in Hunters, Washington. The library district’s rent was $50 a month until recently, when rising utility costs precipitated a boost to $150 a month.

Fun fact: The library carpet was pieced together from scraps left over when a resident carpet salesman retired.

Northport Community Library
The Northport Community Library shares the old town jail with the community museum.

Fun fact: The children’s room is an old jail cell.

Photos: Darrington City Hall and Library by Bill Rohman, Sno-Isle Libraries. Onion Creek Store by Amanda McKeraghan, Stevens County Rural Library District.
HAVING NEVER BEEN TO ORCAS ISLAND, I hesitated not one second when the new *Alki* editor asked if I’d do a story on the Orcas Island Library District and its heavy use of volunteers to run the public library. I quickly made arrangements with Library Director Phil Heikkinen to meet and talk on the island.

After picking me up at the ferry terminal, Heikkinen played gracious tour guide as we drove in a roundabout way to Eastsound, main population center on the island and location of the library. Over breakfast, Heikkinen noted that he and his family were ready for a change (after thirteen years in Arizona, first in Tucson, then in Show Low) and had researched about a dozen locations. Orcas Island was not one of those initial locations, but: “Jobs in places like Orcas Island just don’t appear that often!” says Heikkinen. “I saw the job ad; I felt intrigued; checked it out, and it all just fell into place.”

While the island covers fifty-seven square miles, it feels larger because of its shape, which has been described as a horseshoe or saddlebag. Its varied terrain includes beaches and the highest point in the San Juan Islands, 2,407-foot Mount Constitution.

For just over two years Heikkinen has run the pleasant 6,000-square-foot library that opened in 1993. The facility features a heavily-used meeting room, Internet computers, and a 40,000 book collection. Programs include weekly story times, a book discussion group and occasional visits by authors, storytellers and other guest speakers.

The state library lists the Orcas Island service population at just under 5,000. With the influx of summer visitors, the island’s population roughly doubles, and the library offers $5 library cards good for thirty days, with a two-item limit.

With numerous high windows, the library was bathed in natural light on the sunny late summer day of my visit. Pleasing artwork both inside and on the library grounds adds to the comfortable ambience. It is no surprise then that residents as well as visitors to the island pushed the gate count to over 135,000 in 2005.

I asked Heikkinen about the use of volunteers at the library. He noted that the use of volunteers at Orcas Island Public Library began long before his arrival, and in fact predates the formation of the library district by many years.

“Volunteers are an impressive story here – they ran the library association for almost forty years, until the district was formed in 1988, often numbering about fifty people,” he says. “I’ve never worked in a library system with this proportion of volunteers doing the high-level tasks they do here. They break the rules of what, as a librarian, I had been led to expect was appropriate for volunteers to do.”

Heikkinen estimated that utilizing the sixty or so volunteers who currently do shifts or special projects at the library saves the library district about $70,000 per year. Those volunteers contribute more work than three full-time equivalents, which brings total manpower at the library to around 8-8.5 FTEs.

Heikkinen noted that the library’s volunteers do quality work. He expects them to be reliable, and they are. Attendance is monitored – “We treat them just like employees in that if they can’t make it in, they need to tell us why they can’t make it. I’ve occasionally had to ‘fire’ a volunteer who wasn’t able to keep to a schedule.”

Heikkinen hesitated when I asked if his volunteer staff was as reliable as his paid

*Brian Soneda is director of the Mount Vernon City Library.*
staff. He described the volunteers as “very reliable but maybe not quite as reliable,” and observed that library users seemed to understand that volunteers are great people who work hard, but might make a few more mistakes than paid staff. I thought to myself, “That’s a good answer to a blunt question.”

I asked Heikkinen to describe those “high-level tasks” he assigned to volunteers. He mentioned: cataloging, processing new materials, mending, tracking expenditures for special reports to the board or Friends, tracking front desk income, landscaping, handyman chores, check-in and check-out duties, shelving, backup for story times, participation on the book selection committee, and outreach.

The more involved or complex tasks of course require a higher level of training and a long track record as a volunteer. Kathy Stribling, the library’s volunteer coordinator, estimated about half of the current group of volunteers had been with the library for ten or more years, and noted that these dedicated and regular volunteers tended to be the ones doing the “high-level tasks.”

Two areas of heavy volunteer contribution to the operation of the library jumped out at me, the first being the use of volunteers as the core front desk staff. Stribling’s schedule for the front desk showed that between opening (10 a.m.) and late afternoon, at least one but usually two volunteers were scheduled Monday-Friday. Saturday, volunteer staffing at the front desk was somewhat lighter but still significant.

Another long and impressive list of volunteers appears on the Adult Book Selection Committee, a group of thirteen who meet monthly. While Heikkinen sits on selection committee meetings and plays a role in establishing parameters, the meetings are chaired by a volunteer and selection decisions are made by the group.

Staffing the front desk and some of the other major volunteer contributions have been standard at the library since before the arrival of Heikkinen’s long-serving predecessor, Victoria Parker. Almost immediately upon taking over as library director, Heikkinen began working hard on getting volunteers more involved in collection development through the selection committee and recruiting volunteers to work on special projects, marketing, promoting and fundraising.

Heikkinen says two principles have served him well since his arrival:

1. Don’t assume that what worked in one place is best for another community.
2. Listen to the locals and to the staff.

Both rules are a great fit for a new director coming into a library with such a large and active volunteer base. As Heikkinen notes, “Volunteers have a strong sense of ownership of, support of, and participation in the operation of the library here. Without volunteers, I think we’d have to significantly curtail our operations.” Programs, special events, classes, the Web site, book groups and outreach would suffer.

Volunteers are proud of the contributions they make to the library’s full-service status. Heikkinen and his paid staff are comfortable with this crew of involved and sometimes outspoken volunteers. Together they are part of a library success story on Orcas Island.
AUTOMATION IS A FACT OF EXISTENCE in most libraries. Long gone are the days of card catalogs, wooden shelf-list cabinets and paper interlibrary loan forms. Computerized library systems are taken for granted. They are also, however, expensive and time consuming. Consortial buying can alleviate some of the costs associated with a computerized library system, but for the small, geographically distant member of the consortium this arrangement has its own difficulties and benefits.

One such system is the Washington Idaho Network consortium, headquartered at Gonzaga University in Spokane, Washington. The primary purpose of WIN is to provide Endeavor’s Voyager library system to member libraries. It consists of three smaller consortia, which are in turn comprised of a variety of types and sizes of libraries located in Washington and Idaho.

The staff at WIN is well acquainted with the automation needs of rural libraries. Participating libraries range in size from the University of Idaho to a partially staffed high school library. The smaller libraries tend to be rural, and have their own special needs.

Some difficulties have to do with communication. “Sometimes the lead library decides to do something and just forgets to tell the rest of us,” says Bernie Ludwick, director of the Wallace Public Library in Idaho. “I realize that it is just an oversight, but it can be frustrating. Another problem is computer help – sometimes it takes a longer time to get fixed or the lead libraries think that our computer skills are more advanced than they actually are. Also, sometimes trying to keep up with the larger lead libraries innovative plans and ideas is a little out of our reach monetarily.”

Teamwork is difficult. One issue mentioned by both WIN staff and library workers in conjunction with the rural members of the consortium is that of communication and leadership. All of the smaller libraries are mixed up with larger consortial voices. They share databases with other small libraries, as well as the big guys. This means they also share cataloging policies, resource sharing policies and future plans for software and growth.

In the U.S. government, small states have a voice in the decision-making, and it works the same way in library consortia. However, larger libraries and districts not only have larger voices, they also have more time to devote to considering what the system can be made to do, what they want and how to get it. They may tend to their own needs first, or not even realize their wants and needs are not universal. Unlike Rhode Island, however, the less populous libraries do not have a senate to even the playing field.

Many of the WIN members not only share use of the computerized library system, but have shared catalog record databases. For this to work they have to agree on such questions as: Should we have a maximum number of subject headings on records? If we choose different records for the same item, which one gets used? What kind authority control is important? What should the catalog Web page look like? What sort of searches should be available – what should they be called? What color should it be? What add-on modules should we buy?

These questions may be hammered out in meetings, discreetly decided by the people doing the work, or ignored until there is time to think about them. As the people who have to make the system work, the WIN group gets to deal with them eventually.

In many cases the decisions that larger libraries with more staff can implement on their own are a struggle for the tiny library. WIN staff often steps in to help with things larger libraries would handle internally, such as database maintenance, report writing or clarification about how the system works.
Of course, they do this at the same time they are helping the big guys in completely different ways. “Balancing services so the smaller guys get maximum benefits can be a struggle,” says Paula Foster, project manager of database services for WIN.

The small library staff may suffer from a lack of expertise in some areas. For example, the Endeavor Voyager system, like most systems, consists of circulation, acquisitions/serials, cataloging, and administration. The small library, however, will not usually implement all the modules. Although this lessens the usefulness of the system it is, perhaps, inevitable. One person simply can't learn everything, or have the time and resources to explore what the system can do. For example, many libraries use serials check-in, although they do not use the rest of the acquisitions/serials module. In this case the library gives up status messages for items on order and not yet cataloged, financial information tied to the titles in the system and the system’s reporting capabilities for this data. They often re-enter information into other systems that they are used because they don’t have time to change. Here, the WIN people step in to help determine how much of a module may be useful, and advise on how to use it. The library may still choose to leave much of the module at the side of the virtual road, but they have someone to ask about possibilities and to iron out missteps.

Like everyone, rural librarians want technology. They serve populations that expect it. They enter consortia to stretch fiscal resources. Because they share a catalog, they don’t have to design their own Web page, or fund all of the upkeep. On the other hand, because they share a catalog they don’t get to design their own catalog Web page. Because they are part of the consortium they have access to a great number of options. But, because they have access to a great number of options they have the urge to use them. They may, at times, have an inflated concept of what the system can do. They may want things that are impractical or restricted. Options are available to them that they expect WIN to “turn on,” but then they must be able to run it themselves.

It can be a shock to find out that, to use the enticing WIN doodads, they need to decide on policies, write local procedures and deal with workflow implications. For instance, Voyager has the capacity for the user to write queries in Microsoft Access, which will pull from the database nearly any piece of information it holds. The largest library systems may have people whose primary responsibility consists of writing queries. Smaller libraries may have someone with an aptitude, who will embrace the task because it makes their work more pleasant and interesting. Even these individuals, however, spend time learning about hundreds of data tables and honing skills. A very small library is likely to yearn after the information available, and ask WIN to provide the queries. Since WIN has added a report services position this is feasible, but the waiting line may be long.

One area that sounds great, but can hit remote libraries particularly hard, is courier service. Access to the collections of other libraries, with couriers running between them, can exponentially expand the number of items and breadth of subjects available to rural patrons. In reality however, the transport vans don’t get to the more remote locations every day. Items may take days to arrive, and to return home. The upshot is patrons wait for the items, and the travel time may keep the piece out of circulation longer than the check-out period. The implications for items borrowed from larger libraries are considerable. The implications for items borrowed from the small, remote libraries are even more invidious.

The benefits of sharing a catalog include being able to see what is available to patrons and place a hold, says Bernie Ludwick, director of the Wallace Public Library. “Having computer system backup is mandatory for us small libraries with librarians that wear every hat. Having a network of people with the same scope to consult with is wonderful and enlightening.”

Resource sharing is probably the biggest boon to small libraries. Many libraries find themselves part of a single catalog with several others. For the patrons, this means a single search brings up many more items. The catalog has expanded, and will continue to do so. Some libraries have found that the urban centers benefit from the enhanced trade of materials, too. Isolated libraries tend to have collections of local history, biography and regional interest that may contain titles scarce in the larger institutions.

The gadgets to transform the world in this way would be out of the financial reach of most rural libraries. In fact, in many cases the same is true of the large libraries involved. By pooling their fiscal resources they have acquired far more technology than any could have achieved alone, and the contribution of the most geographically remote institutions has aided in the achievement. In some cases, in fact, the most rural libraries are prime movers in the overall acquisition. For example, the Valley Automated Library Network, one of WIN’s consortia, had increased grant opportunities because of the presence of rural public and school libraries in the consortium. Without them, the opportunity to purchase a computerized library system might have been much altered.

Because of the number and variety of libraries involved, the WIN group gets to
work on a wide range of problems. The client libraries reap their own benefits from the diversity of problems presented. In addition to the Web page Endeavor posts for people to share problems and fixes, WIN libraries learn from the tribulations of the other members, as filtered through WIN’s expertise. They deal with: server problems (Why will email notices not go out today?); reporting (It gave me 135 results yesterday, but won’t run today); and downtime (It’s our busiest day of the year!). For many small or rural libraries, WIN may be the only technical help available.

When they cannot answer the question or fix the problem, or when upgrades need to be scheduled or downtime negotiated, WIN deals directly with Endeavor on behalf of member libraries. The personal relationships they develop with the company, and the time they spend explaining needs and coordinating calendars are attributes most rural librarians could not think of possessing.

“Joining has been a marvelous decision,” says Ludwick. “We do get so many more benefits than we would have otherwise. The linked catalog, the computer knowledge behind the catalog, just the general knowledge of the larger library directors is wonderful education.”

Join WLA.

The Washington Library Association includes some of the best and brightest members of the Washington library community. In our numbers we have classified staff, trustees, Friends, librarians, techies, students, book-people, cybrarians, artistic types, literary types, creative types and even library directors! We come from college and university libraries, from public libraries, from special libraries, from school libraries. Some even come from no library at all.

What unites us is our care for the well-being of Washington libraries. WLA offers an annual conference, specialized training, legislative support for libraries, a journal, and a variety of leadership and creative opportunities. WLA makes a difference in how Washington libraries see themselves and their work. For more information visit our Web site at www.wla.org. Explore the site, and make our business your business. Download a membership application from www.wla.org/memberap.pdf, or join online at www.wla.org/registration.html.

WLA: Building partnerships in the Washington library community.
Whitman County Farmers Reap Benefits of Library Services

By Sabrina Jones

FOR SHARON APPEL, harvest starts with a trip to the Colfax Library for an armload of books on tape.

She and her husband Eric work 2,000 acres of wheat and barley. “Every harvest my husband sends me to the library and I peruse up and down the rows of books on tape,” says Sharon. “He still has the old-fashioned cassette player in his combine and tractor, so I jokingly told him he’s either going to have to upgrade to a DVD or his only options will be Westerns and romance!”

Launching a legacy

It all started with just 300 signatures – during harvest, of course. The date was August 1944, and the place was Colfax, Washington, a hamlet encircled by rolling hills of grain. Residents there wanted a public library district and took it upon themselves to make it happen. They turned in a petition to their Whitman County commissioners, ensuring its place on the ballot that fall. Voters approved the measure and the Whitman County Library (WCL) District was born.

“Travel between our small towns could not have been easy when the library district was first formed in the mid-1940s, so the idea that the entire county could work together for library service and funding must have been really revolutionary,” says WCL Director Kristie Kirkpatrick. “Being a library district for as long as we have has given us a rich history of providing quality service, while our community members have a real sense of pride and commitment to their small town libraries.”

The library has come a long way from its first location in an old saloon with bare floors and war surplus furniture. In 1948, there were twenty-five branch libraries and 44,000 books in circulation. Today, technological advances enable the library system to serve the county with fewer, more efficient branches. Nearly 11,000 cardholders can visit any of the thirteen branches or search the library’s Web site and choose from more than 75,000 books, CDs, DVDs and audio books.

What feeds the success of this rural library district? According to Kirkpatrick, the answer is simple: unparalleled customer service, community involvement and strategic planning. “We do our best to employ people with extremely positive attitudes,” says Kirkpatrick. “I look for energy, enthusiasm and a real love of people when filling our jobs.”

Throughout its sixty-two-year history, WCL has always been an innovative leader, whether it was offering bookmobile services county-wide in the 1950s; becoming the first Washington state library to participate in the Collaborative Summer Reading program in 2002; or forming partnerships with local public schools to provide online career curriculum.

Over the years, Whitman County residents have jumped into action for their libraries, too. When a new library was built in Colfax in 1960, the local Jaycees Club and other volunteers formed a “book brigade,” passing books one person at a time down the block. History repeated itself forty years later in the town of Rosalia, when that branch library moved to a new location and students, teachers, business owners and other citizens lined three blocks to personally transfer books to the library’s new home.

“Our first priority, since our inception, has been to instill a lifelong love of learning to the people we serve,” says Kirkpatrick. “I think that’s evident in how we’ve met the challenges of a changing society, especially given the relatively recent advent of technology.”

Sabrina Jones is a freelance writer who watches harvest from her window in St. John.
Photo by Sandy Martin.
Technologically savvy

Whether it’s writing grants or upgrading its computer system, WCL works hard to stay current. Through its Web site and the “Ask Us” 24/7 virtual reference service, the library is literally open all the time.

WCL recently received a federal grant to partner with ten Whitman County schools and provide a new online program called “Building Bridges.” According to coordinator Erica Willson, the program “helps students discover their interests, improve academic skills, prepare for standardized tests and keep an electronic portfolio of their work.” Each school contributed to the cost of the software, while the Institute of Museum and Library Services subsidized a large portion of the program’s cost. Willson and another instructor visit the schools regularly to teach additional program features and monitor student progress.

WCL also recently installed a new computer system that handles its entire inventory and catalog access via the Internet. Systems Administrator James Morasch says online customers are now able to search by format and view thumbnail book images. “Our search options have expanded quite a bit,” he says. “But we also tried to preserve the basic look and feel of the system to minimize any confusion.”

Community involvement

The community responds to the library system’s commitment. In recent elections in Whitman County, library measures passed by more than 75 percent. Most of the taxpayers in the library’s district pay fifty cents per $1,000 assessed value. “We don’t rely on a city or any community groups to donate money to us for our budget,” says Kirkpatrick. “I think that makes us unique as a rural library in that we have a set budget we can count on each year.”

One example of this support can be seen in the town of St. John, population 530. Consistently one of the busiest branches in the system, St. John boasts the largest children’s program and the highest per capita usage, excluding the main Colfax library. In November 2005, St. John voters overwhelmingly passed a half-million dollar, fifteen-year bond measure to construct a new public library building that will include the city services department and local museum.

“Libraries are as much about people as they are about books,” says St. John Branch Manager Clancy Pool. “Although our book circulation will increase to about half as many more books as we currently have, we need to remember it’s also important to have room for people to sit and enjoy themselves.”

And find room they will. The library will move from its current 500-square-foot quarters to 1,800 square feet of space. The number of public computers will double; its hours of operation will increase; and wireless Internet access will be available.

Board Trustee Jon Kehne says he is amazed at how WCL “offers the most for the least” in its programs, materials and services. “Our director possesses the innate ability to inspire everyone on her staff.”

“What sets the Whitman County Library system apart from other like-sized districts is the energy of its staff and its ability to get out into the communities it serves,” says Karen Goettling, assistant program manager for library development at the Washington State Library. “They have really learned about marketing and they apply that knowledge in their promotion efforts.”

Harvest time

Whitman County is often referred to as The Palouse, for its rolling fields of wheat, barley, peas, lentils and other crops. For decades, most residents have worked in the farming industry, whether as a landowner, rancher, hired hand, parts dealer, chemical sprayer, retailer, or a high school student looking for a way to make extra money. Out here, farming is the way of life.

During harvest, the days in the fields are often long. To Pool,
harvest means a captive reading audience. Last summer, she called area grain companies and asked if she could put a box of books in their elevators. “The main reason I started this program and suggested it to all the branches is because the main goal of the library is to serve all of our residents,” Pool says. “Harvest crews seemed to be an underserved population since they work twelve hours a day, seven days a week and are only free to come to the library if it rains.”

Pool filled boxes with a variety of genres, but went heavy on Westerns and suspense since most of the truck drivers are men. Into each book she inserted a bookmark that listed the library’s toll-free number, Web address and hours. “We were excited to be able to use the books to help encourage reading,” says Beau Duff, assistant manager of the St. John Grain Growers. “We offered them to our employees and to the truck drivers who were coming through with their loads.” The Grain Growers manage six elevators that collectively handle more than three million bushels of wheat during a typical harvest. At the height of harvest, about 150 trucks a day pull up to each elevator. “It sure was a nice gesture and I received a lot of positive feedback from our grain elevator operators and truck drivers that they appreciated the library thinking of them,” says Jerry Schauble, president of the Inland Empire Milling Company, which has four elevators.

An Appel a day
At the Appels’ Colfax-area homestead, farming is a family affair. Their five children help out; Eric’s brother, a Gonzaga University professor, drives semi-truck; and a family friend from Seattle takes a week of vacation to drive a truck. Sharon gets up at 5:30 a.m. and washes the dishes around 9 p.m. But she looks forward to time in the field. “I worked half days driving truck,” she says of the last harvest. “It was great! I got to listen to books on tape. I was able to read in an air-conditioned environment. I had quiet time!”

While their days are often filled with grain raining down from combine spouts, the Appels have also enjoyed discovering new authors. “I gave Eric a Dean Koontz book on tape to listen to the other day and he wasn’t so sure about it at first,” says Sharon. “But before I knew it, I was back at the library looking for the next book in the series! Without our library, we’d have to listen to a radio station that wouldn’t come in very well and listen to the same songs over and over. Having these books on tape is a great resource for us out here on the fields.”

---

Ken Haycock & Associates Inc.
Building capacity for leadership, advocacy and collaboration

Specialists in serving library boards...

✓ executive searches for directors and senior staff to ensure the best match for your needs
✓ training and consulting in effective governance, board leadership, advocacy and community development

Contact Michelle Rudert, Director of Client Services
Voice: 604.925.0266; Fax: 604.925.0566; E-mail: admin@kenhaycock.com

www.kenhaycock.com
I MUST CONFESSION that the title is of this article is slightly incorrect. I do not have a master’s degree in library science, therefore I am not a “librarian.” Unfortunately, I can’t convince the 675 patrons of the Metalines Community Library.

I run the library alone, most of the time. I have occasional volunteers, but no coworkers. The Pend Oreille County Library District has four libraries, including this one. In 1998, budget problems forced three of those libraries to cut back from two workers to a single manager. I have managed this library for twenty years. For the last eight, I have worked alone under the title Branch Supervisor.

I work in the library. I am the library. Therefore, patrons insist, I am the librarian. They tell their children, friends, neighbors, and visitors, “Lynn is the librarian.” Being an honest person and not wishing to snub those who earned the title, I continually beg to differ. “No,” I say. “I am a paraprofessional; I have a library technician degree.”

I explain until the person’s eyes glaze over and they become zombie-like. It doesn’t convince them. So, I just grin and look over my shoulder for any true librarians, who might not understand how hard I try to set things straight. I seriously think new terms should be considered to better explain what various library staff people do. For now, I am Lynn the Librarian.

Next confession: What I do is the same as staff people in many libraries, but I do it all. I open the library. I close the library. I check out; I check in. (My latest fetish is cleaning book covers as they come in.) I shelve only on rare occasions – not because I’m lazy, but because I don’t have the time. I do some processing. I do the overdue notices. I move books. I mend. I do the bookkeeping. I rotate the collection of just under 10,000 books, videos and audiostreams. I do story time, summer reading and young adult programs.

As the years have gone by, I’ve learned to do book selection, ordering, the new book-list, the library newsletter, public relations for the local library – and the whole county at times.

I am the hostess, the greeter, reference librarian, children’s librarian, computer “expert” and copy master. I have been told many times how lucky I am not to have to do the same thing all day every day; but then again maybe doing one thing all day isn’t so bad? Here is my third confession: There are dangers in working alone. I am in a zone. When I’m alone projects get done because I just do them. I usually don’t have to communicate procedures, policies, or ways and means to anyone other than patrons.

When I have volunteers it means I have someone in my face asking, “What is this? How do I do this?” Communicating takes a lot of time; time I don’t always have. My favorite volunteers are usually people who show up once a week and need little direction. They have a job and they do it.

I confess I am a compulsive multitasker. When you staff a library alone multitasking is not an option, it’s a necessity. In the course of a day, I am interrupted what seems like hundreds of times. I start something; move on to another task; go back to the first task; then on to a different task. In a day, I leave a long trail of tasks behind me as I move from person to person, request to request, patron to computer, computer to patron, check-in to request, to checkout. I can’t finish one thing and move on to the next. There is always someone wanting help. Of the phone is ringing.

Multitasking does not faze me. The disadvantage? Small notes with requests, questions and books to order float around, waiting to be found and completed.

Since I began writing this, my status has changed. I am now a Branch Supervisor II, which means I oversee the running of two libraries: Metalines Community and Ione Public Libraries. I now supervise one clerk, a substitute and a volunteer, from a distance. It is changing how I operate.

I share the work with a library assistant. I work five days, she works two. I still work alone most of the time and do everything that needs to be done. But now I will have to communicate what I do, and so will she. I am relearning the art of communicating with coworkers. That will be the subject of my next article: Confessions of a not-so-lone “librarian.”
Library association hires new webmaster

LISA HILL took over as the Washington Library Association’s webmaster in July. Since 1999, she has worked as Web services librarian for the King County Library System, where she has overseen the redesign of KCLS.org – three times.

Prior to joining KCLS, she worked for the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, troubleshooting network, software and hardware issues for libraries that received foundation grants. Before coming to the Northwest, Hill was assistant systems librarian at Boone County Public Library in Florence, Kentucky. In addition to other duties, she managed the Web site, performed hardware and software upgrades on eighty computers and managed the firewall, Web and Galaxy server.

In the mid ‘90s, Hill worked at the Athenaeum of Ohio, a theological institution affiliated with the Catholic Archdiocese of Cincinnati, where she managed the serials collection, and maintained the Web site, computers and library network. In 1995, she earned her master’s in library science from Indiana University in Bloomington.

American Library Association president to speak at 2007 WLA conference

The 2007 Washington Library Association Conference is set for April 18-21 at the Three Rivers Convention Center in the Tri-Cities. Scheduled speakers include Leslie Burger, president of the American Library Association and director of the Princeton Public Library in New Jersey; Diane Rehm of National Public Radio; and young-adult author David Lubar.

Other planned conference activities include a jet boat trip on the Columbia River, an evening with comedian Brad Upton, and a visit to a local winery.

For more information about the conference go to www.wla.org/conferences/wla2007.

Conference profits go up

The Washington Library Association made a profit of $18,602 on the 2006 Tacoma conference – that’s a $6,790 increase over proceeds from the 2005 WLA conference in Spokane. In 2005, conference attendance totaled 379, compared to more than 500 who registered for the Tacoma conference.

“We deliberately move the conference around the state both to spread the work and to make it possible for more library workers to attend any time the conference is nearer their home base,” explains Association Coordinator Gail Willis. “The larger the population base near any given conference the higher the possible attendance becomes – and with that, generally, the higher the profit.”

The annual conference accounts for less than 0 percent of the association’s yearly revenues.
Library Legislative Day set for Thursday, March 8, 2007
Get Involved.

In 2006, more than one hundred supporters from all over the state visited Olympia to participate in the Washington Library Association’s annual Library Legislative Day. Constituents representing all types of libraries raised awareness about library services and ultimately enhanced our ability to establish and sustain long-term relationships with key elected officials.

We encourage you to join us in 2007 as we again meet with state senators, representatives and their staff to discuss the value of libraries and the impact of proposed laws. Legislators will remember your presence and message when it comes time to make important decisions.

It’s easy!
This is a great opportunity to network with library supporters from around the state and further understand what issues aid and plague libraries. You’ll also be able to observe the Senate and House in action. WLA will provide all the tools you will need to be effective in conveying pertinent messages about libraries, as well as information to give to legislators during each visit.

Join us.
Your participation can make a difference. Registration forms will be available later this year at www.wla.org.
For more information, call Jennifer Wiseman at (425) 369-3233. In the meantime, mark your calendars for March 8!

Note: Public Disclosure Commission guidelines prohibit most public employees from participating while on public time. Participation in this event must be on personal time.

Upcoming Alki themes
“Changing of the Guard” is the theme of the March 2007 issue of Alki.
We will spotlight long-time Washington Library Association members who have made significant contributions, and introduce newer association members worth keeping an eye on. The deadline for the March issue is January 15, 2007.

The July issue of Alki focuses on conference coverage. And “Underserved Populations” is the tentative theme for the December 2007 issue.

If you have an idea that fits one of these themes – or one that doesn’t – please contact Alki Editor Margaret Thomas at alkieditor@wla.org, or (481) 481-1250.

Interested in serving on the Alki Editorial Committee?
The recently announced resignation of Lynn Barnes, of the Metalines Community Library in Pend Oreille County, leaves a vacancy on the eight-member Alki Editorial Committee.
Members are appointed by the association president and serve a two-year term. Appointments are often based on recommendations from the committee chair.
The committee provides direction to the editor and sets policies and procedures. Members are expected to attend three Editorial Committee meetings per year, and contribute to the journal.
For more information, visit the Washington Library Association Web site at www.wla.org and click on ‘Publications.’ Those interested in a possible appointment should contact Mary Wise, Editorial Committee chair, at wisem@cwu.edu.
Net Neutrality: Why Librarians Should Care

By Elena Bianco

SHOULD TELECOMMUNICATIONS COMPANIES be required to provide equal access to their services? It's a complicated question and one whose answers are couched in a maze of technological, economic and free speech arguments that have many of us scratching our heads.

First of all, there’s the definition of “net neutrality.” What exactly is it? According to Wikipedia, the term’s technological definition refers to “a property of protocol layering in which higher-layer protocols may not communicate service requirements to lower-level protocols.”

Yikes.

Luckily, the more commonly-used context of the term “net neutrality” is a bit easier to grasp. In a nutshell, it describes the controversy over whether the government should require Internet service providers to treat all packets of data they send neutrally.

The controversy comes with the concern that ISPs are moving toward a structure where they would prioritize their own Web content and services and would treat packets of information from other content providers differently, depending on how much the content providers pay them.

As librarians, the outcome of the debate could have profound implications for our patrons and what they will be able to access. It also has implications for us as Internet content providers.

One thing’s for sure: We’re going to hear a lot more about this and we need to make sure we understand all sides of the controversy.

This article will attempt to briefly explain some of the issues involved and look at the status of net neutrality legislation in Congress.

Arguments for keeping the status quo

Telecommunications companies, like AT&T and Verizon, argue that legislation to enforce net neutrality is unnecessary and could damage their business. They argue that they can’t continue to guarantee the quality of their customers’ internet connections when some Web sites, like YouTube, eat up bandwidth. They argue that it’s only fair for them to charge a premium for customers who use more of their services, and in return, to assure them priority delivery.

Opponents of net neutrality claim that legislation is not necessary. The competition will force them to keep net neutral policies, they say. In September, hardware manufacturers, including Corning, Motorola and Tyco, told Congress that the Federal Communications Commission can deal with any complaints, and not to incorporate net neutrality provisions in the Telecommunications Act.

Some even argue that net neutrality laws would serve to impede the free speech of ISPs. If an ISP wants to restrict access to something they consider indecent or homophobic, opponents say, net neutrality regulations would not allow it. They argue that it is just as much of a violation of the First Amendment to force an ISP to convey a message it does not wish to convey as it would be to prevent it from conveying a message in the first place.

Arguments in favor of net neutrality

Supporters of net neutrality don’t buy those arguments. They are concerned that a fee

Elena Bianco is a reference and public services librarian at Shoreline Community College.
structure imposed by ISPs adds up to discrimination against less wealthy content providers. Supporters also insist that Internet users, not ISPs, should have control over what they view on the Internet.(6) As librarians, this argument resonates with us. We believe that the Internet needs to remain equally accessible to all. The comparison is often made between ISPs and the companies who own telephone or cable lines. They remain neutral when it comes to content and don’t discriminate based on that content.

The American Library Association has taken a stand in favor of net neutrality. Former ALA President Michael Gorman has said that organizations such as libraries, colleges and nonprofit organizations stand to lose the ability to make their content and services equally accessible if the telecommunications companies are allowed to charge fees in exchange for speedier delivery.(7)

Tim Berners-Lee, inventor of the Internet, has been very vocal in supporting net neutrality legislation.

“The neutral communications medium is essential to our society,” he said in an interview with the New York Times in September. “It is the basis of a fair competitive market economy. It is the basis of democracy, by which a community should decide what to do.”(8)

The Internet’s climate of net neutrality has allowed new applications to thrive. If ISPs gain too much control and no longer treat information neutrally, that innovation will be stifled, according to Berners-Lee. Instead of competition forcing ISPs to support neutral treatment of data, he claims, ISPs would take advantage of their power to control content to suppress competition. For example, there have been instances where ISPs have restricted routing their competitors’ content and services.

He is sympathetic toward ISPs’ arguments about the need to preserve the quality of internet connectivity for all of their users. For example, he says he does not oppose ISPs’ ability to charge additional fees for high bandwidth uses. They can find ways to do that and still adopt net neutrality.(9)

**Current legislation**

A number of bills started through Congress last spring. However, the House passed its telecommunications bill House Resolution 5252 in May without adequate protections for net neutrality. The Senate Commerce Committee passed its own telecommunications bill S 2686. An amendment to the bill that would have added net neutrality language failed in a tie vote. The debate has now moved to the full Senate.

Washington State Congressman Jay Inslee has been a prime supporter of such legislation. He co-sponsored the Net Neutrality Act, HR 5273 last May. The bill’s goal was to enforce network neutrality in order “to promote open broadband networks and innovation, foster electronic commerce, and safeguard consumer access to online content and services.”(10)

The outcome of the November elections bodes well for net neutrality legislation. With Democrats in control of Congress, it is very likely that some type of net neutrality legislation will get farther than it did last spring.(11)

In the meantime, ALA has been working with legislators on proposals to ensure affordable broadband rates for libraries, consumers and other nonprofit institutions, to ensure freedom of content and non-discriminatory access to all information sources.(12)

---

**Bibliography**


TRIBAL LIBRARIES ARE AS DIVERSE as the native peoples they serve.

There are twenty-nine federally recognized Native American tribes in Washington state. Each is a government with rights and responsibilities toward its enrolled members, on or off the reservation. Tribal libraries are those maintained by the tribe, usually on a reservation. In Washington there are more than twenty tribal libraries. A tribal library may be public, academic, school, or special, such as archives or museums. All of these libraries have culturally specific materials designed to meet the needs of their communities.

Challenges faced by tribal libraries may include a remote location, an economically disadvantaged population, and establishing an appropriate “library culture” among people strongly rooted in oral traditions. For many tribal libraries, including the Yakama, Lummi and Jamestown S’Kkallam, language and heritage preservation are a critical part of their mission. However, each of these libraries has a unique role in its community.

Yakama Nation Library

Located in Toppenish, the library is part of the Yakama Nation Cultural Heritage Center. It houses 16,687 books, eighty-five magazine subscriptions, eighty-two tribal newspapers and newsletters, and a large special collection bequeathed by Nipo Strongheart, an actor and later a technical advisor on films depicting Native Americans.

The library is open to the general public, and Yakima County residents have borrowing privileges. Storytelling is available for the Yakama’s Headstart programs.

Vivian Adams, director of the Yakama Nation Library, responded to three questions about her library.

ALKI: What is the role of your library?
ADAMS: The mission statement of the library is to provide educational and entertaining material, which includes Native American and Plateau information in all medium[s] for the patrons and also utilizing up-to-date technological methods.

ALKI: What are the biggest challenges for your library?
ADAMS: The biggest challenge for our library at this time is getting the funding for the Sahaptin language speakers to assist the library in development of language learning materials utilizing its technical equipment.

ALKI: What is your biggest wish, hope or goal for your library?
ADAMS: Our biggest wish is to create CD learning materials that meet the language needs of the enrolled members, the patrons and the tribal employees. Our hope is that these and other library activities will entice our people back into their heritage for continuity and preservation. Our goal is to create learning materials that entertain and educate about our native culture, and the many other interests of our patrons.

Lummi Library

The Lummi Library is a part of the Northwest Indian College in Bellingham. According to the campus Web site:

“The educational philosophy of Northwest Indian College is based upon the belief that the opportunity of post-secondary education must be provided within the Native American community. Northwest Indian College is committed to the belief that self-awareness is the foundation necessary to achieve confidence, esteem, and a true sense of pride; to build a career; to create a “self-sufficient” [lifestyle]; and to promote life-long learning. It is also committed to the belief that a self-awareness program must include a study of Native American culture, values and history.”

The Lummi Library has a unique collection of Native American books and videos, periodicals, and microfiche. About a third of the collection is special collections material for in-library use. The library has materials to support all of the subject areas taught at the college. In addition, the library has a collection of general-interest materials on topics including gardening, cooking and health. The Lummi Library also maintains a virtual library at www.nwic.edu/lummilib/index.html. The library is an Online Computer Library Center member and offers interlibrary loans.

In addition to the NWIC community, all residents of Whatcom County, students from Western Washington University, Whatcom Community College and Bellingham Technical College have reciprocal borrowing privileges at the Lummi Library.

Jamestown S’Kkallam Tribal Library

Jamestown is unique in that it is not an incorporated village, and it does not have a commercial center. Jamestown is the historic
settlement of the ancestors of this S’Klallam tribe located along the Strait of Juan de Fuca, approximately seven miles from Sequim. Near the mouth of the Dungeness River, the area was traditionally the major fishery for the local S’Klallam people.

The Jamestown S’Klallam Tribal Center campus is in Blyn, Washington. The tribal library is on campus, within the Health and Human Services Annex.

The library’s collection focuses on the Jamestown S’Klallam and other tribes, and Native American law, according to the library’s Web site. Rare reference materials on the history, language and culture of the S’Klallam and other Olympic Peninsula tribes are available to researchers for in-library use. In addition, tribal songs, dances, stories, speeches and other events are preserved on more than 300 video recordings.

The library also has a growing body of materials related to health, natural resources, family preservation, chemical dependency, children and youth, and early childhood education, according to the Web site. “Our goal is to provide access to materials that may not be available in other public libraries.”

The library is staffed by a part-time assistant, with additional support provided by the tribe’s Department of Health and Human Services, which shares space with the library.

Volunteers from within and outside the community, including participants in the tribe’s Summer Youth Program also help in the library.

**Support for tribal libraries**

One issue at many tribal libraries, is the fact that the staff has limited library education and training. Native Americans make up a very small fraction of professional librarians, and library schools and other library education programs also are falling short. According to a 2004 statistical report by the Association for Library and Information Science Education, nationwide Native Americans made up 0.3 percent of all graduates from library-related undergraduate, graduate and doctoral programs in 2002-2003. No statistics were available for associate’s degrees.

The American Indian Library Association, an affiliate of the American Library Association, is working to address some of the issues on the national level. ALA 2007-2008 President-Elect Loriene Roy is a past AILA president. Roy is enrolled on the White Earth Reservation, a member of the Minnesota Chippewa Tribe. Her work is centered on developing and promoting library services and cultural heritage initiatives with and for indigenous populations.

The AILA is a membership action group that addresses the library-related needs of American Indians and Alaska Natives. “Members are individuals and institutions interested in the development of programs to improve Indian library, cultural and informational services in school, public and research libraries on reservations,” according to the association’s Web site. “AILA is also committed to disseminating information about Indian cultures, languages, values, and information needs to the library community.”

The Institute for Museum and Library Services also recognizes the challenges facing tribal libraries. The institute offers two targeted grant initiatives for the Native American community: The Native American Library Services Basic Grant with Education/Assessment Option, and the Native American Library Enhancement Grants.

Basic Grants are available to support existing library operations and maintain core library services. The purpose of the Education/Assessment Option is to provide funding for library staff to attend continuing education courses or training workshops; for library staff to attend or give presentations at conferences; or to hire a consultant for an on-site professional library assessment. Both grants are noncompetitive and distributed in equal amounts among eligible applicants.

Enhancement grants support projects to improve existing library services or implement new ones, particularly projects to expand access to information and educational resources in a variety of formats.

Funded projects target library services for people from diverse geographic, cultural and socioeconomic backgrounds; those with disabilities, limited functional literacy or information skills, or who have difficulty using a library. Grant funding is aimed at underserved urban and rural communities, including children from families with incomes below the poverty line.

The Yakama Nation Library, the Lummi Library and the Jamestown S’Klallam Library have all been recipients of IMLS grants.
Roslyn Library Stretches to Serve a Changing Community

By Erin Krake

ROSelyn IS A SMALL TOWN in the central Cascades. Our municipal library is the oldest in the county. It was founded before the turn of the century at a time when the town was booming with coal miners and the families they brought with them from the “old countries” of Eastern and Northern Europe. Today, just over 1,000 people live in Roslyn. Many of them are direct descendants of those early settlers.

The Roslyn Library enjoys solid support and growing financial investment from the city and county. There is a dedicated and dynamic cadre of volunteers. The Friends of the Roslyn Library has raised more than $10,000 this year. People check out library materials for their children that they borrowed themselves twenty-five years ago. Their names are scrawled in their own childish handwriting on the borrower cards we still use for circulation. It is cozy place, funky yet inviting, and treasured by those who have used it for years or for generations.

And now the area is experiencing an influx of new residents and visitors. The development of a golf resort adjacent to town is helping to turn this little-known paradise into a destination. People are not just coming to recreate, they are deciding to stay. According to the Washington State Office of Financial Management, population in this county is expected to grow 22 percent by the year 2010, and that figure may be conservative.

This new population consists of people with very different backgrounds, values and needs. On the one hand, there are wealthy people purchasing half million dollar lots to put up multimillion dollar homes, along with the urbane professionals who sell and market to them. On the other, there are blue-collar construction workers who move where the jobs are as they struggle to raise their families. Many of them speak Spanish as their primary language. This puts the community, and intrinsically, its library, at a crossroads. We are facing the challenge of providing services for a lot of new and diverse people.

As it is now, our community has a library of which to be proud, and that is a start. What started as a “pay shelf” reading library (a self-serve rental arrangement) crammed in a corridor of the City Hall building stands today as a small, but vibrant community center poised for takeoff. The eclectic collection will be available online by the end of the year. There are three public access Internet stations and a growing variety of databases, thanks to the Washington State Library. And, most exciting of all, plans are in the works to restore and renovate the turn-of-the-century building that has housed the library since 1918. The project includes an expansion of library space and plans to open up the old gymnasium for large gatherings that can also be used for the library’s many children’s and cultural programs.

Just like any urban or suburban library, the Roslyn Library offers a set of traditional core services: a collection of circulating books and other materials; children’s story time and other programming; Internet access and public computers; reference services; and community information.

But many public libraries are now offering their core services in new ways – namely through electronic means like virtual reference service, downloadable audio books, and digitized collections.

Small libraries, particularly stand-alone municipal ones like the Roslyn Library, don’t have the resources to do it all. We must find out what people, both old and new, really want and need, then work toward providing it through the often limited means available to us.
That is what we are trying to do in Roslyn. To find out what people want, we are distributing a community questionnaire on library services, hours of operation and the renovation project. In the meantime, it is easy enough for one staff person to informally note those things we don’t offer that newcomers are looking for when they come through the door. What I have found so far is that new people, most of them from library districts or metropolitan areas, are “expecting” to find (and do not):

- Wireless Internet connection
- A large collections of audio books on CD
- Interlibrary reciprocity
- An online catalog

Yet, those same people that came in expecting services they didn’t find, also found others they didn’t expect. They found best sellers without waiting lists, lenient rules, like the absence of overdue fees, and highly personalized service.

Other small and rural libraries share our situation of increasing populations and expectations. We also share the advantage of being very close and tuned in to our patrons and our communities. For the most part, we know what people want and whether it will fit. But, we must not forget to reach out to the new people coming into our communities. At the very least, we must anticipate their needs.

To meet the challenges that change brings, I believe smaller libraries like ours must make methodical plans to provide new or enhanced services that make sense for our own libraries and communities. The planning process has to be open and flexible so we can recognize and take advantage of the many opportunities for partnership and synchronicity that exist, even in a small town. And we cannot forget to put the bulk of our efforts into providing core library services in ways that are still relevant and useful to our patrons. It makes little sense to provide self-checkout stations, for example, if people aren’t checking out many books because the book budget is too low.

In the midst of planning for change, the Roslyn Library continues to do what it does best. It serves as a cultural and community center for the town, with good books, fast computers, and stuff for kids and adults to read and do. The next time you are in Roslyn, stop by and see for yourself all that can be done in a little library with a lot of community love. Just don’t expect wireless. Not yet.

---

**National Conference Focuses on Rural Libraries**

*By Erin Krake*

**IT MAY BE IN THE WAY** that people give directions: “Just go on by the Old Jenkins Place and hang a left.” Or in what people do for fun on a Saturday night: Contra dancing at the Grange Hall.

Yes, most people know what is rural without a definition. But there are many ways of defining “rural” and with development pressures and urban sprawl, the clear lines that exist in most of our minds are growing fuzzier to agencies like the U.S. Census Bureau or the Center for the Study of Rural Librarianship, in Clarion Pennsylvania.

It is safe to say that the vast majority of public libraries in the United States serve rural populations – communities with fewer than 25,000 people, for example.

The role of the rural public library is no different than for public libraries in general. However, rural libraries share a distinct set of characteristics and challenges that their counterparts in major metropolitan centers do not. Geographic isolation, resistance to change on the part of staff and governing officials, and lack of professional training for staff are examples of these obstacles.

And the people they serve face similar challenges. The Rural Policy Research Institute found that they are often poor and uneducated and lack adequate medical, transportation and housing resources. So, it is
appropriate that there are so many resources
directed toward rural library service today.

I attended the 2006 joint conference of
the Association of Rural and Small Libraries
and the Association of Bookmobile and
Outreach Services in Columbus, Ohio, at the
end of September, along with eight other
Washington library employees, courtesy of
the Washington State Library. The issues
facing rural libraries were addressed in three
days of workshops with titles like “Simple
and resourceful ideas for running a small
public library,” and through the sharing
of resources, like the American Library
Association’s “Toolkit for Library Advocacy.”

Carla Lehn of the California State
Library shared some other resources avail-
able to rural libraries through a presentation
called “A national perspective on rural library
programs.” Here are a few of hers, with a few
more thrown in:

• **The Rural Library Initiative**, the
  California State Library’s program to
  provide support to its rural libraries,
  but whose many resources are
  available free to all libraries.
  http://rurallibraries.org

• **Webjunction**, the online “meeting place” for librarians, has a
  collection of resources specifically for small, rural libraries on
  topics like sustainability of technology, funding and advocacy.
  www.webjunction.org (Follow the links to Rural and Small
  Libraries.)

• **The American Library Association’s Committee on
  Rural, Native, and Tribal Libraries of All Kinds** provides
  a Web site with information on best practices, advocacy and
  funding, plus a publication titled *The Small but Powerful Guide to
  Winning Big Support for Your Rural Library.*
  www.ala.org/ala/olos/oloscommittees/rnt/ruralnative.htm

• **The Rural Library Clearinghouse** shares best practices,
  policies and procedures through a search interface.
  www.resourceroundup.net

• **Rural Library Survey**
  www.ala.org/ala/olos/outreachresource/servicesrural.htm
  (Follow the links to the pdf files for this 2004 survey.)

• **Association of Rural and Small Libraries** listserv service
  ARSL-L@listserv.clarion.edu

• **Center for the Study of Rural Librarianship**, a program
  of the Department of Library Science at Clarion University.
  http://jupiter.clarion.edu/~csrl/csrlhom.htm

It is gratifying to see so much energy put into assisting rural
libraries like the one for which I work. The ample resources, free
online training, and professional development offered through these
services and this annual conference make my job a lot easier and
more pleasant. I hope other rural librarians will use some of them and
experience the same positive results.

---

**Podcast introduces the “Credibility Commons”**

David Lankes of Syracuse University discusses an effort to learn
more about Internet search strategies, in the
latest issue of *Infospeak*, a podcast program
produced by students at the University of Washington Information School.

The Credibility Commons is an experimental environment for sampling different
approaches to finding reliable information on the Internet. Researchers and the public
can try out search strategies, collections
and software designed to access credible
information.

Lankes directs the Information Institute
of Syracuse and teaches at Syracuse
University’s School of Information Studies. He was director of the
ERIC Clearinghouse on Information and Technology from 1998-2003
and co-founded the award-winning AskERIC searchable Web site.

Infospeak showcases outstanding leaders in the area of information access and awareness. The program is online at www.infospeak.org.
My Mom, the Librarian: Extending the Definition of Rural Library Service

By Angelina Benedetti

I own a thirty-year-old edition of the ARCO Civil Service Test Tutor for Librarians. Described as the “authoritative text for librarians, assistant librarians, and senior librarians for federal, state, and municipal examinations,” it is always good for a chuckle. It was not a very useful resource when I was in library school, but it did get at some basic principles.

“Making information available to people is the job of librarians,” says ARCO. “They select and organize collections of books, pamphlets, manuscripts, periodicals, clippings, and reports, and assist readers in their use.”

By this definition, my mother is the librarian for our circle of friends and family.

Mom is no stranger to library work. When I was in high school, she worked as a library assistant at our local library. There she checked out materials, answered reference questions and directed patrons to their favorite authors. She brought home all manner of books, magazines and media for our household consumption. She got me through many a last minute homework assignment.

It took some convincing on her part but eventually I saw the wisdom of going to library school. I graduated and got a job working for the same library system, which was by then a much bigger organization.

Then Mom and Dad retired and moved to a tiny Eastern Washington community of under 500 people. They live five miles off a paved road and forty-five minutes from the nearest full-service grocery store. The nearest public library is fifty minutes away. It is open two days a week.

As might be expected, my mother suffered library withdrawal. At first she tried to convince herself she would be fine without access to a diverse collection of books, magazines and media. She and Dad sprung for super-deluxe satellite television service (for the house and his wood shop). After a few months, though, the strain started showing.

Every trip she made to Costco (on the east or west sides of the mountains) she bought a half-dozen paperbacks. She subscribed to a record number of magazines. She haunted the used video and DVD bins at the local discount and video stores.

Even when she worked for the library, she was not a real big Internet user. Now she was debating the merits of AOL versus Earthlink versus MSN. My sister and I shook our heads and wondered at this altogether new Mom.

It did not take too long for the books and magazines to accumulate to the point where she needed to pass them on, circulate them, as it were. The books found their way into the hands of friends and neighbors who might enjoy them. Then the magazines, the videos and the DVDs.

Soon she was not just buying for herself but building a collection. She found that her budget stretched farther when she purchased used copies from Amazon.com. By this time, I was on a book selection committee for the American Library Association and receiving review copies from publishers, and so she asked if I might send her spare books for her friends, now her own special sort of patrons. Picture books went to the neighbor who was raising a new granddaughter. Fantasy books went to another neighbor who worked for the forest service. Inspirational books were

Angelina Benedetti manages the Selection and Order departments for the King County Library System.
donated to the senior center and retirement home. She got first dibs on all mysteries and romances, not too bloody, not too racy.

In recent years, Mom has moved beyond collection building and now provides her own kind of reference and reader’s advisory service. Everyone in our family and in her town knows that if you have a question (about where to buy the best cobbler mix, about how close the fires are, about who is dating whom) Mom may not know the answer, but she will know who to ask and get back to you. I now receive care packages with newspaper clippings, DVDs, and out-of-print cookbooks. I have gift subscriptions to magazines I did not know I needed.

“Family Handyman will be very useful when you go to build that patio you keep talking about,” she explained when it arrived one day.

Last week, when we were chatting, as we do, about what we had been reading, she told me that two of my favorite romance authors had new books out. “I think I will interlibrary loan them from our local library,” she said. “Their catalog is online now, and if they don’t have them, I can request them from another library system. I got a book sent from your library the other day.” I let her go on, knowing what was coming. “I suppose I could have just waited for you to sell them used on Amazon.”

My mother may not be working in a traditional library any longer, but she understands the economics of the modern library world. As a member of her family of patrons, I know that I am receiving the kind of service ARCO would have applauded.
Those Amazing Librarians!

By David Wright

OKAY, ADMIT IT: You started reading this because you thought you might just find yourself mentioned herein. Not that librarians are a self-regarding lot, but I have received several emails asking for a repeat of a column I did a couple years back that featured libraries and librarians in fiction. Could it be that novelists have our number, and have discovered a sure-fire way to outlast the weeder's cruel scythe?

Case in point: I’m a bit intimidated by hefty science fiction epics, but I currently find myself lured well into the second volume of Sean McMullen’s vast Greatwinter Trilogy, where the future of humankind lies in the hands of librarians. Set in late 0th century Australia, Souls in the Great Machine introduces us to a low-tech world emerging from a crippling Ice Age to face a new threat hidden from a forgetful society in the wastes of time. Mysterious machines on autopilot construct some ominous structure on the surface of the moon for a reason long since forgotten, and only the ruthless Highliber of Rochester, Zavora Cybeline has both the foresight and hindsight to fathom the danger, with the aid of a jaw-dropping primitive computer forged from flesh and blood.

So what does a world run by librarians look like? An enormous, seething bureaucracy where savage battles over rival classification schemes are settled with flintlock and steel, and scheming megalomaniacs sell their souls for a taste of the elixir, information. You guessed it: McMullen has a library degree. This stunningly detailed, thought-provoking trilogy continues with The Miocene Arrow and The Eyes of the Calculor.

And though pseudo-Tolkien isn’t really my bag either, how can I resist the escapades of Halfling assistant librarian Edgewick Lamplighter, a sort of Bilbo Baggins with a master’s in library science, who applies his book learning to protect the Vault of All Known Knowledge from ghouls, trolls and dragons in the pages of Mel Odom’s The Rover, first of a trilogy? Just a glimpse of the pastel cover of Bettina Krahn’s romantic adventure The Book of the Seven Delights would cross this one off my list, but wait – is that a plucky librarian who is gallivanting across 19th century North Africa in search of the lost library of Alexandria? Well okay, I might give it a spin.

And British horror writer Ramsay Campbell definitely has my number when he reveals the eerie miasmic terrors that lurk in the stacks in The Overnight. Something is definitely wrong at the newest branch of Texts, a big impersonal chain bookstore whose arrival in the Fenny Meadows retail park in Northern England has roused some inchoate evil from its unholy mire, unleashing weird exasperations on the staff such as misprinted promotional flyers, computer meltdowns, and wildly disarranged books whose damp, slimy pages feature blurred, unreadable text. Hauntingly familiar, I know.

Although there have been other fine titles featuring librarians and library workers recently (The Other Side of Air, by Jeanne Braselton; Good Girls Do, by Cathie Linz; In His Arms, by Camille Laurenz; Lynn Sharon Schwartz’s The Writing On the Wall; The Ghost Writer, by Anthony Harwood; and most notably, Lydia Millet’s Oh Pure and Radiant Heart), the most fascinating library fiction I’ve read lately was about one of our patrons. Mark Swartz’s Instant Karma is the footnoted jottings of one David Edgar Felsenstein, an oddball anarchist habitué of the downtown Chicago Public Library, which he is planning to blow up someday. Librarian Eve Jablom seems the only person he wants to connect with, but she can scarcely compete with the multitude of voices that clamor for his attention from the rows of books. I’ve come upon the jottings of the mentally ill a number of times in my own library, but none so amusing, intriguing or scary as this. ⌂

David Wright is a readers’ services librarian with the Seattle Public Library and chairs the Readers’ Advisors of Puget Sound.
WLA Thanks Our 2006 Members

Sustaining Members
- Aman & Associates

Nonprofit Members
- Bibliographic Center for Research
- Friends of Federal Way Libraries
- Friends of the La Conner Library
- Highline Association of Library Technicians (HALT)
- Orbis Cascade Alliance
- Washington Coalition Against Censorship
- Washington Coalition for Open Government

Institutional Members

Orcas Island Library District
San Juan Island Library
Lopez Island Library District
North Olympic Library System
Jefferson County Rural Library District
Seattle Public Library
Kitsap Regional Library
Clover Park Technical College, Miner Resource Center, Lakewood
Ocean Shores Library
Lower Columbia Community College
Stevens County Rural Library District
North Central Regional Library, Chelan, Douglas, Ferry, Grant, and Okanogan Counties
Gonzaga University, Foley Center
Spokane County Library District
Northern Public Library Distrinct
Eastern Washington University Libraries, Cheney
Whitman County Library
Pend Oreille County Library District
Neill Public Library, Pullman
Asotin County Library

San Juan Island Library
Bellingham Public Library
La Conner Regional Library
Sedro-Woolley Public Library
Sno-Isle Regional Library, Island and Snohomish Counties
Everett Public Library
Edmonds Community College Library
University of Washington Libraries
King County Library System
Renton Public Library
Tacoma Public Library
Puyallup Public Library
Washington State Library
Pierce College Library, Puyallup
Pierce County Library System

Timberland Regional Library, Grays Harbor, Lewis, Mason, Pacific and Thurston Counties

North Central Regional Library, Chelan, Douglas, Ferry, Grant, and Okanogan Counties
Ellensburg Public Library
Carpenter Memorial Library, Cle Elum
Steilacoom / Puyallup
Renton Public Library

Mid-Columbia Community College, Moses Lake

Yakima Valley Regional Library
Yakima Valley Community College Library
Heritage College, Toppenish

Yakima Valley Community College Library
Mid-Columbia Library, Benton, Franklin and Adams Counties
Walla Walla Community College

Other Seattle / King County Area Members:
- City University, Tsaltes Library
- Green River Community College, Holman Library
- Highline Community College Library
- Seattle Central Community College

ALKI: WLA Journal
4016 First Avenue NE
Seattle, WA 98105-6502