

Growth and Vitality for the Small Library

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Introduction

1 Successes of Small Libraries	7
Grass Roots	8
“Why Us?”	10
Individual Initiative	11
Contrasts	13
Small Projects	14
Cooperative Efforts	15
Community Involvement	17
A Lighter Touch	21
2 The Elements of Success	21
What Makes Success?	21
Interest	21
Assessment	22
Initiative	23
Getting Help	23
Planning	24
Knowledge and Learning	24
Cooperative Efforts	25
Conclusion	26
Notes	26
Appendix	28

Introduction

Shortly before I enrolled in an MSLS program at Clarion University, I picked up a copy of *American Libraries*, hoping to get some kind of advance feeling for the field I was about to enter. I was looking for something global. I wanted to understand the library field all at once. But the article that caught my eye in this issue was very specific: "Small-Town Dreamers Build \$1.8-Million Community Library." I had passed over hundreds of such articles in the past for lack of interest in what appeared to be of only local value. I read the article. Surprise! It was quite interesting, lively, even inspiring. I put down the magazine feeling a bit cheerier. Not such a bad deal for the evening. I didn't realize the seed just planted was to grow into an interesting research project in one of my first library science courses — into the words I am now writing.

My goal in presenting the following accounts is to convey the spirit of enthusiasm and dedication on behalf of small libraries that seems to abound in all parts and to point out some of the factors that may lead to success. Rather than recounting the story I read about the new Redwood Falls Public Library, I refer readers to the original article.¹ I believe it speaks best for itself. In this paper, I tell many other small library stories it inspired me to seek out. I began my work with a novice researcher's typical worry: "Will I find anything on this topic?" After a few weeks I realized there was so much in the current journal literature on the successes of small libraries that I would have to set an arbitrary limit in order to allow time to finish writing. I found that small rural communities all over the country and, in fact, all over the world, have grown their own libraries, so to speak, as did Redwood Falls, MN.

What leads to growth and vitality for small libraries? In the following accounts, successes are measured not only in successful fund-raising campaigns and spacious new facilities, but in community relations initiatives, the struggles and contributions of individual librarians and volunteers, political relations initiatives, outreach projects, cooperative projects, and other colorful endeavors as well. The second half of this paper looks back at these stories and tries to name the elements that led to success.

Successes of Small Libraries

Grass Roots

When it comes to building a library, small communities often depend on the initiative of a few interested individuals. "It's a dream come true!"

began a Nebraska story,² quoting members of the Gretna Library Foundation as they inaugurated their new 4,000-square-foot library early in 1992. The Gretna Public Library was founded in 1929 by the Gretna Women's Club, whose members donated books and staffed the library for nearly 40 years. They also raised funds to convert an old gas station into a comfortable library building. In 1968, the building was donated to the town of Gretna, which provided its first tax support. By 1980, the residents of Gretna, population 1,609, recognized the library needed to expand, but voters defeated a bond issue, thwarting their own wishes for a larger library. In 1982, a group of interested people formed the Gretna Library Foundation. For the next eight years, foundation members carried on grass roots fundraising of every conceivable form. They raised \$150,000, with the largest individual donation not exceeding \$17,000. At that point, the library was eligible for and received a Library Services and Construction Act matching grant of \$100,000 through the Nebraska Library Association.

Every phase of the new library's establishment witnessed integral local involvement. The library director and two library trustees, a foundation member, a city councilman, and the city engineer formed the building committee. Local businessmen aided with construction, interior finishing, landscaping, and grounds work. Boy Scouts, 4-H Club members, elementary school students, and other citizens of all ages helped with the move into the new library building. A flag and flag pole were donated by the American Legion and VFW. One town resident made and donated a stained glass window. Some volunteers helped type records for the new computerized circulation system, and others pledged to continue helping with reading programs. The author of the Gretna article has been the library's director since 1985. She is a mother of nine and a former school teacher.

Less than two years earlier, another small Nebraska community had just finished building its own new library. The Alice M. Farr Library in Aurora, NE (population circa 3,800), was dedicated on April 1, 1990, eight years after its conception.³ After the city council agreed to fund its operation, a foundation was established in 1984 and an architectural firm was selected. Most of the funding came from the Frank and Alice Farr Trust and a Nebraska Library Commission grant. A meeting room was funded by another county foundation. The building site was carefully chosen, but an old house stood on the newly acquired property; and construction was delayed for a year when it turned out someone had requested the Nebraska Historical Society place the house on the Historical Register. When the matter was finally resolved in the library's favor and it finally began to move into its new home, many individuals and organizations pitched in. Most of the books were moved by five junior high school students doing

community service. Logistics of the move were supervised by the library's maintenance engineer. Alice Burling, the author of the article, was the library director.

“Why Us?”

Sparsely populated areas far from the usual amenities of civilization have to take the most basic, yet creative actions to maintain library services. Consider the eight most remote library service points of the Libraries and Culture Section in the Small Isles of Scotland.⁴ Deliveries to libraries are by ferry or private carrier or, in one case, to a jetty on the mainland where they are collected by local residents in their own boats. The collections are administered by local volunteers under the guidance of the Library Support Unit in Inverness. This region uses stock rotation and requests services (interlibrary loan) including fax to serve its widely dispersed population. The residents of one island erected a shelter on the mainland to protect books waiting for pick up. One of these eight service points, Inverie, though on the mainland, has no road or rail access. The inhabitants made a former telephone switching building available to house both their own collection and books supplied by the library service. The necessity of such efforts is likely to surprise us, since few Americans have ever lived in a place where library service was not provided either close to their home or at most a short distance away. The residents of Scotland's Small Isles have made it clear by their actions that they are willing to make what appear to us to be austere sacrifices for their library services.

Halfway around the world and a quantum leap forward in amenities, libraries in Northern California are also finding need of grassroots citizen efforts. For more than two decades, libraries of the 13 northernmost counties of California have been joined to form the North State Cooperative Library System. During the past several years, political, social, and economic reversals in have made it hard going for California libraries. My brief conversation with Jim Kirks, director of the North State Cooperative Library System,⁵ revealed nearly all of its libraries have faced or are facing real crises of survival and level of service. In Shasta County, one library was closed three times. Susanville District Library moved several times. Trinity County Library declared “No outlet shall be closed.” Lassen County was disestablished. These struggles are still in progress.

Jim Kirks referred me to one of North State's members, the Modoc County Library in Alturas, CA, where I spoke to Fay Stahl, who has been

a volunteer there for 15 years.⁶ Her story revealed the level of commitment within this Northern California library group and the kinds of efforts they have made in order to survive and thrive. The Modoc County Library, where Fay Stahl works, is now flourishing under the leadership of a new director, but not without a struggle. Modoc County has a population about 10,000 and lacks an industrial base to support its economy. There are three branch libraries in addition to the main library in Alturas. In 1987, the county was feeling the effects of California's Proposition 13, which reduced property taxes. The county supervisors had not renewed the funding allocation for the county library system. Community activists in Alturas arranged the formation of a Mello-Roos⁷ district that allowed citizens to vote on increasing property taxes to support the libraries. The measure was approved by the county supervisors in August 1988 and in December received a required two-thirds majority approval from voters. As a result, the libraries of Modoc County will have funding until the provisions of the measure run out (some years from now). Admittedly, it has the earmarks of a "hand-to-mouth" existence; but for the moment Modoc County Library seems quite healthy. This can be verified by a visit to its home page at nscls.library.net. (On October 25, 1997 Modoc County Library celebrated the 50th anniversary of its temporary (!) home at 212 West Third Street in Alturas, CA.)

Individual Initiative

In 1989, the Chicot County Library in Lake Village, AR (population circa 2,800), needed a director and Lee Walker needed a job.⁸ At that time, the county library system recently had lost its tax base and could not afford to hire a degreed librarian for the director's position. The library had only 1,400-square-feet of floor space. Chicot County, population 15,713, had only two other towns, each with its own tiny branch library. It was not part of any regional library system. Illiteracy ran at about 25 percent. The library was open only 27 hours a week with one paid staff member, one paid librarian, and one substitute employee. The annual budget was \$56,000. Lee Walker and her husband were just starting out. He had just accepted a ministry nearby, allowing Lee to accept the position. Although she had some feelings of reservation, Lee Walker's orientation and training (she had started out as a social worker, working with children) inspired in her an enthusiasm for the job. She set about learning and doing. She got the library involved in the community and took an interest in state library events and issues. She enrolled in an MLS program. In 1992, the local millage was restored and the budget surpassed \$95,000. The city took on utilities costs. Armed with increased enthusiasm and a few years' adminis-

trative experience, Lee Walker saw to it that the library extended its hours, added fax lines, new telephone lines, outdoor bookdrops, and improved its interlibrary loan service. The collection was regularly evaluated and weeded. With new prosperity, staff salaries and benefits increased, staff utilization was evaluated and improved, staff morale rose, and naturally patrons, too, were appreciative of the changes.

If so much was accomplished by a new librarian, shouldn't we expect an experienced librarian to give an even more stunning performance? The answer is yes! In the late 1980s, Dr. Gerhard Denckmann, a doctor of philosophy in Salzhausen, Germany, died and left his entire estate to this community of 10,000 inhabitants.⁹ Dr. Denckmann had studied under the philosopher Karl Jaspers, especially concentrating on the aesthetics of Immanuel Kant. His bequest specified that the estate's resources be used to foster "fauna, flora, and literature." Mrs. Catharina Schulz had moved to Salzhausen (about 25 miles south of Hamburg) in 1973 from New South Wales, Australia, where she had received a diploma in librarianship and worked in the state library for about 10 years, mostly cataloging foreign books (including an estimated 30,000 volumes in the Dutch language), which she said was "great fun." Catharina Schulz approached the city council to convince them Dr. Denckmann's gift offered the municipality an opportunity to establish a library and that she would make a fine library director. After overcoming the hurdles of her foreign academic qualifications, future financial assurance, and the restoration of a villa that would house the library, she turned to the regional library center in Luneburg and to her husband, a computer specialist, for assistance. The Schulz's wrote their own library automation program and Catharina Schulz engaged three assistants. The Salzhausen library became the first computerized small library in the region.

When the Salzhausen library opened, it held about 5,000 volumes. Appropriately, this included Dr. Denckmann's sizable collection of books on philosophy, literature, and art. In a few years, it linked with local primary and high school libraries and established a patients' library in a nearby hospital. School classes visit the library frequently. The library sponsors special Christmas and Easter reading programs for children and their parents, and holds book exhibitions on current topics throughout the year, frequent book readings by age group, and summer holiday "book and breakfast" programs. (There is a small kitchen in the library.) Surprisingly, Catharina Schulz says in her article that she works only 14 hours a week, handling all acquisitions, administration, advertising, etc. There is a voluntary staff of eight women that carries on the daily routine of the library. Catharina Schulz attends quarterly meetings to keep her in contact with other "country" libraries. The regional center in nearby

Luneberg advises all country libraries in the district. Most are run by untrained, but devoted volunteers. The center offers "schooling programs" in "rhetoric, repair of books, [and] advertising." At the time the article was written, the center was beginning a course in Allegro-B, a program for computerizing library catalogs, but it also "acquires, catalogues, [and] binds" books.

Contrasts

The author of an article on two small Florida libraries has tried to show libraries can fare differently in similar settings, and the following two tales lead us to realize differences may run very deep.¹⁰

Communities, like people, have personalities; and they have different agendas. Two small towns on Florida's Gulf Coast show how vastly different the experiences of small libraries can be, even though they are just a few miles apart. Seminole Public Library was founded in 1959 by the local Women's Club, which thought the town should have a lending library. Club members squirreled away donated books, constructed bookshelves, and sewed curtains. Shortly, they moved into their first home, borrowed space in a local motel. Dues were \$1 per year or \$10 for a lifetime membership. The library subsisted for many years with an exclusively volunteer staff. When funds were needed, they held fish fries and bake sales.

It wasn't until the 1980s that growing pains forced a new mode of operation for Seminole Public Library. By then, there was a new library director who, though drawn from volunteer ranks, was a degreed librarian. She took up the banner, going straight to the mayor and public officials, and telling them the city needed to run the library. At the same time, she was energetically soliciting as many contributions as she could from every commercial and private interest in town. It took many visits to the city to make her point; but when she finally did, city officials gave their vigorous support. They were aided by the creation in 1988 of a county public library cooperative system, which enabled the library to apply for state funds. With increased funding, the library was now able to hire a professional staff, thus improving operations. But all hurdles were not crossed. Library funding represented part of the impetus behind a proposed 33 percent tax increase, and the mayor shortly was faced with a protest by more than a thousand citizens. He stood his ground and told protesters that this was the only way the town would have the library it needed and deserved. In a few years, with full municipal support, the Seminole Public Library opened a new building costing \$1.5 million, with 75,000-square-feet of space including a combination community center-multimedia room, computerized environmental controls, and room to allow for future expansion. On opening day, there were lines out to the sidewalk and the sheriff was called in to

keep order and direct traffic. In the first month, 3,000 cardholders were signed up (in a town of about 10,000). Many of those who earlier stood opposed to the new library openly told the mayor they had changed their minds.

Indian Rocks Beach, Florida is about five miles from Seminole. It is a somewhat smaller community (about 4,000 residents). Like the Seminole Public Library, and so many other small libraries, the Indian Rocks Beach Public Library was started on a shoestring by volunteers. Over a period of about 20 years, its collection grew to more than 20,000 volumes, but from here forward the picture becomes quite different. City officials voted to keep the library small. They decided to focus on staffing, but settled on an all-volunteer staff of 40(!) stalwarts, who keep the library open six days a week. They also declined to hire a professional librarian, prompting the president of the Friends of the Library to accuse the city of fearing "change and professionalism." At the time the article was written, the library consisted of two small rooms within the city hall complex. A recently added children's room was built lacking any electrical outlet. In a county with 15 public libraries, Indian Rocks Beach Public Library was one of only three libraries that did not join the county library system. The telling differences between these two small Florida towns seems to be in the focus of will and commitment to support their respective libraries.

Small Projects

Being small doesn't mean that nothing can happen. The Alexandrian Public Library of Mount Vernon, IN (population circa 7,200), opened a library store in 1992.¹¹ Well, actually it was a peddler's cart. Being too small to afford or house a library store, the library decided to buy a book cart. When even that expense proved too great, they built one and set up shop in the library's lobby, selling new and used books, games, library note cards and bookmarks, and other small stationery. The side benefit of the apparent limitation, however, was that they were able to wheel the "library store" to local events, resulting in some minor outside sales and some more than minor public relations for the library. Never content to stand still (pun intended), in 1994 the library opened "Matilda's Mug and Muffin," a coffee shop, in the library lobby. Again they set up on a shoestring. Bringing oak furniture from the town's old library building meant that the only purchases were for vacuum thermoses, paper supplies, coffee and tea. Matilda's Mug and Muffin has proved to be a popular spot for local residents to meet, read and conduct business.

Another small library found limited funds did not prevent it from launching and carrying out a successful project. The First United

Methodist Church Library of Huntsville, TX, reached far beyond its accustomed borders and found some joyful work to do.¹² Normally, the library serves a congregation of about 1,500, providing materials for church services and the church preschool and holding weekly children's story hours. All of this on an annual budget of \$600, with an all-volunteer staff. Then they decided to reach out. Spending less than \$150 for their public relations effort, they developed cooperative programs with the local public library and several public school libraries. They made a drive for donations and new volunteers appeared. One of their projects involved the children of the church school in making up a joke book for patients at a local pediatric cancer clinic. In addition to achieving the goals of their year-long drive and finding new partners and projects to develop, they received a John Cotton Dana Public Relations Award in recognition of their successful outreach program.

Cooperative Efforts

Library cooperatives are still in the pioneering phases. The following accounts give a picture of these early efforts. Four rural libraries in east central Illinois decided to undertake a cooperative collection development project.¹³ The public libraries of Atwood, Bethany, Lovington and Sullivan (combined population circa 8,000) acquired funding from an Library Services and Construction Act grant and sought the guidance of a consultant from the Illinois State Library. The first stage of their work was an assessment of their combined holdings. They began by following a set of formal procedures specifically designed for collection assessment. As they progressed, they felt the need to customize the process to include notes on special collections items, community interests and community support, and circulation, interlibrary loan, and other statistics. This assessment process enabled them to know their collective and individual subject area strengths and gave each librarian a familiarity with the collections of the other three libraries. The second stage of work presented a finer challenge. The four librarians met to determine how each was to share in collection development. They discussed individual collection priorities and assessed their individual collections' strengths and weaknesses. Then they assessed the group holdings and reached agreements on how to develop them. Finally, each librarian committed herself to developing designated subject areas with not only her own collection, but those of all four libraries in mind.

The third development stage for the public libraries of Atwood, Bethany, Lovington, and Sullivan involved each library in rewriting its individual collection development policy, leading up to the writing of a

policy for the group as a whole. These four libraries had a strong history of informal cooperation, but they decided that with all the planning and work they had put into the project's preparation, they would be wise to formally document their plans in order to clarify goals and responsibilities for themselves and others for both present and future purposes. As a byproduct of these efforts, each librarian came to know much more about her own library. The results of the project were greater ease in locating materials and information and increased speed of interlibrary loans. Patrons also became better informed about the choices of material available to them. Other cooperative collection projects might require less formal organization. Also, additional money is not necessarily required. The plan itself should enable the libraries to redirect funds because budgetary savings will result from successful cooperation. The librarians involved presented the results of their project at the Illinois Library Association Conference in 1991.

In an entirely different kind of collection development project, 13 small libraries in Suffolk County, England, came up with a "village collection" scheme to offset the disadvantage of their remoteness from each other and from the 28 other libraries in Suffolk.¹⁴ The fact that the county libraries receive funding for acquisition based on the number of borrowers, has left these small libraries with very small collections that often fail to provide adequate variety to borrowers. This exists in spite of customary 50 percent per year exchange of library stock for each library in the county. The "village collection" scheme secured a one-time funding grant to purchase more than 1,000 books, exclusively for the 13 small libraries. These books were then divided into 13 mini-collections which rotated within the member libraries every eight weeks. Care was taken not to duplicate current holdings and to select "good reads," but not best sellers (for which there would be too much demand). The mini-collections were marked and shelved separately and the exchanges were recorded and controlled by a central automation system. After six months, the system was receiving high marks from patrons and staff alike. On the average, 63 percent of the "village collection" was on loan at any given time, compared to an average 24 percent for the regular library collections. Also, each book averaged 13.7 loans per year, as compared to four loans per year for books in the regular collections. Since the scheme seemed to be very popular and economical, the libraries calculated how much it would cost each library if the scheme were to be repeated on an ongoing basis. They found that the cost was well within their modest budget allowances.

Some small libraries have formed groups in order to cut the costs of automating.¹⁵ The Cape Libraries Automated Materials Sharing (CLAMS) cluster in Massachusetts (Cape Cod and Martha's Vineyard) uses one cen-

trally located computer to serve 14 public libraries, one academic library, and two scientific institutions. Cataloging can be a particular challenge for system sharing. Many of the catalogers had no computer experience. Also many librarians may feel as though the ground is being taken out from under them when catalog cards are taken away and replaced by information somewhere in a computer. CLAMS formed a bibliographic committee to draw up standards for the bibliographic database which serves the entire system. (Final approval was left to the CLAMS Board of Directors.) The bibliographic committee continued to monitor quality control as the system developed. The public libraries of Pinellas County, Florida, also formed an automating cluster. The first step in their shared cataloging was accepting one another's cards and working on retrospective conversion from catalog cards to computer readable records. Each library agreed to convert its own records, but the library directors met frequently to work toward greater familiarity between libraries with regard to holdings and the conversion process.

Community Involvement

Finding success stories, as mentioned earlier, was easy. Finding small library community involvement stories was more difficult, but there were a few outstanding examples. The following accounts from West Virginia, Illinois, Mississippi, and New York show community involvement can give a library a whole new look. The Kingwood Public Library in Kingwood, WV, keeps its public relations lively.¹⁶ It has flyers, a monthly newsletter, frequent radio and newspaper publicity releases, a weekly newspaper column, and appearances by staff members at meetings of local groups and on radio programs, when possible. National Library Week and Children's Book week are especially targeted and there is a Summer Activity Program for children. In spring 1984, the library wanted to do a bigger project, something out of the ordinary. An opportunity arose when Robert Pyle came to research an excavation project on behalf of the city. Kingwood (1990 population 3,243) had received a construction grant that required a prior archeological survey, and Robert Pyle was looking for a site to display recovered artifacts. Irresistible! The library requested and was granted permission to be headquarters of "The Kingwood Archeological Project." By the time the project was under way, it had grown into something quite special. The library staged a "community dig," replete with photo opportunities, a walking tour, and press coverage, that allowed residents to participate in the archeological recovery. Simultaneously, it put exhibits from Robert Pyle's earlier recovery projects on display at the library. Long after the Kingwood Archeological Project was over, visitors were still coming into the library to ask about what had been found.

While the Kingwood Public Library was still in the planning stages of its archeology project, it received a visit from members of "The Arthurdale Commemorative Committee." In past years, Kingwood Library had expressed an interest in Arthurdale, a nearby municipality founded as an experimental resettlement project early in the administration of President Franklin D. Roosevelt. The Arthurdale Commemorative Committee was now asking for help in planning a 50th anniversary celebration. Kingwood's library board agreed to co-sponsor a grant application to help fund the observances; and Kingwood Library became a co-planner of and participant in the three-day celebration, to be held later that summer. The grant was approved, bringing approximately \$9,000 in support; and the library's centerpiece for the festivities was to be an Eleanor Roosevelt Film Festival, honoring the former First Lady who had staunchly supported the resettlement community concept. (The event, by chance would coincide with the 100th anniversary of her birth.) "The Arthurdale Dream - Then and Now - Celebrating 50 Years as a Community," featured visits by prominent dignitaries, including a son and granddaughter of Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt, and a series of pertinent newspaper articles written by West Virginia University students. The weather cooperated with three days of sun and blue skies and visitors were treated to a photo exhibit, the library's film festival, several dinners, a square dance, speeches, and a dramatic production reenacting Arthurdale's early days. There was radio, television and newspaper coverage throughout all phases of the event as well as plenty of favorable, spontaneous publicity. The Eleanor Roosevelt Film Festival was restaged in the fall for those who had missed it and as an outreach event coinciding with National Children's Book Week. Is it any wonder that Kingwood Public Library's funding election, which occurred right between the two programs just described, yielded a favorable result for the library!

Rural libraries in Illinois, like those in many areas of the United States, went through difficult changes in the 1980s. In 1994, the Illinois Institute for Rural Affairs at Western Illinois University, in cooperation with the Illinois State Library, initiated a program to develop a new role for libraries in local economic development.¹⁷ The public library in Geneseo, IL (population circa 6,000), participated in this state-sponsored program and became involved in the local chamber of commerce, which allowed it to develop a rapport with the local business community. It provided a moderator for some chamber functions, showcased materials of interest to local businesses, and having broader hours of service than the chamber, was able to act as a "branch depository." It also displayed information on local tourism and filled requests for information from the Economic Development Database and Access Illinois. The library director became a regular at the chamber of commerce meetings and annual chair-

man for the town's largest community event, the Victorian Walk, which brings thousands of visitors to the community. Finding that the library had begun to involve itself in local affairs, the community began to respond in kind. Local businesses became more aware of the library as a resource. Telephone requests increased. The chamber of commerce newsletter listed items regarding library services and materials and made information packets available at the library for prospective new businesses in Geneseo. The Geneseo Economic Development Group named the library director and a library trustee to a committee for future planning and goal-setting. It is clear that both the local government and the library quickly discovered a future in working together to serve each other and the community.

Another public library that participated in the same state-sponsored economic development program had a similarly positive experience. In Mount Morris, IL (population circa 3,000), a new organization, Build Mount Morris, grew out of the library director's participation in the community's strategic planning. The business community, initially surprised to find the library involved in civic development, gradually settled into an appreciative attitude. Locally, the library gained respect for serving the community's broader interests. The library director became a board member of Build Mount Morris. She took charge of several projects including grant writing, developing a community profile and database, and adding business materials to the library's collection. Out of these activities came a fresh assessment of how local businesses might be of service to the library and a better vision of how the library fit into the overall economic development of the community.

Another type of community relations venture worked wonders for a library in Mississippi. Librarians of the Jackson-George Regional Library System in Pascagoula, MS (1990 population 25,899), spent the early months of 1985 dreaming of the newly proposed Pascagoula Library building.¹⁸ The librarians wanted it to be a cultural center and that spring established a funding project they hoped would make the library an exhibitor of fine arts as well as a house of belles lettres. Carrying out their dreams brought them in close contact with community organizations and individuals who solicited and made contributions to the artworks fund. Local fundraising brought more than \$33,000 along with local-media recognition of both the project and the impending dedication day for the new library. By the time of the Saturday night gala and the Sunday afternoon dedication, nearly every person and group in town wanted to be involved. Jackson-George also had recognized the need to take a leadership role in the chamber of commerce, economic development clubs, service clubs, and social groups. This allowed them to get to know the community and vice versa. The result has been better informed library service.

Community relations does not have to involve the city council or local businesses and organizations. In Shirley, NY, in September 1989, Mary Maggio gave up a quiet assignment updating vertical files to become her library's advisor to "Young Teens."¹⁹ Two years earlier, the head of the children's department had decided to target sixth, seventh, and eighth graders for special activities; but for two years, none of the staff was willing to make a thoroughgoing commitment to the project. There were successful talent shows and not-so-successful dances, and an idea of serving food at book discussions that backfired when librarians realized that greatly swelled attendance resulted in massive consumption of food and very little discussion of books. Sometimes doubting her own sanity, Mary Maggio decided to show that if properly approached, the teenagers would respond. She turned her attention to getting the Young Teens Advisory Board monthly meetings under control. Simply not serving food was a key to eliminating those who came only to eat and disrupt. She also cut back the frequency of the meetings to whenever there was group planning to do. After some time, a conscientious group of "concerned teens" remained. Eventually, discussions led to ideas until, with tempering, she channeled youth ideas into realistic activities. A mock game show involving 150 participants and spectators was a great success that gave the group credibility with the rest of the library staff. Mary Maggio took encouragement and began kindling interest at the dances by serving free pizza (compliments of Domino's Pizza) and giving out raffle prizes. The dances gave her a chance to speak to many of the teenagers individually. She found that even "the toughest-looking kid loved to share his or her opinion" and later might show up at the library. This led to further teen programs at the library and to all of the teens' knowing they could tell Mrs. Maggio their ideas.

The culmination for Mary Maggio was the inception of "The Place-for Young Teens" (or simply, "The Place"), a room which the library set aside for this age group. While a description of "The Place" might sound like the anticipated nightmare to adults, the key was that gave the Young Teen group a place of their own which, while outlandish to the eye, was treated with care and respect. If further proof were needed, one could point to increased Young Teen attendance in library reading programs. Fun and learning had joined forces and Mary Maggio felt she had proved her point. There was no indication she would ever want to pack in her work with Young Teens and return to the vertical files. (The Mastics-Moriches-Shirley Community Library in Shirley, NY, is not a small library. The library district serves about 42,000 residents of suburban Long Island. But Mary Maggio's story is a perfect example of the interest and initiative needed in library service areas of all sizes, if libraries are truly to serve their communities.)

A Lighter Touch

Success doesn't always require superhuman efforts. Sometimes it can be the result of a simple kindly action. In 1986, a librarian of the Washburn Memorial Library of Washburn, ME (population 2,000), helped an elderly gentleman find a book about aviation pioneers.²⁰ The man was a former aviation stunt-racer and the book, which he had contributed years before, had an entry about his own aviation exploits. After the book was found, the old gentleman and the librarian had a brief conversation. The following year, unbeknownst to the library, the man made out his will, in which he left a sum of money to Washburn Memorial Library in gratitude to the librarian who assisted him. Not until 1994, however, a year after he died, did the library learn of the bequest, which totaled \$91,000. The story assumes a greater dimension in light of the library's annual budget, which was then only \$26,000. The library purchased a new furnace, new windows, vinyl siding for the entire exterior, and a new photocopier and still had \$70,000 remaining, which was placed into a library trust fund.

2 The Elements of Success

What Makes Success?

What leads to growth and vitality for small libraries? Naturally, there are many possible explanations as to how and why certain libraries and librarians achieve success. The following analysis may help to package, so to speak, the essential elements for those who would translate inspiration from others into successes of their own. The author has identified seven factors that contributed to successful outcomes in the foregoing accounts: Interest, Assessment, Initiative, Getting Help, Planning, Knowledge and Learning, and Cooperative Efforts.

Interest

Lee Walker had no library experience or background when she accepted a position as director of the Chicot County Library in Lake Village, AR. In her, perhaps, we see more clearly than in long-time librarians, the importance of enthusiastic interest. The popular American nine-to-five ethic tells of "Blue Monday" and "Thank God Its Friday." That certainly doesn't make for enthusiasm on the job. Former Chief Librarian of the Library of Congress Archibald Macleish remarked that when changes are needed in an institution, there is a fertile period in the early days or years, after which change becomes very difficult.²¹ In this light, enthusiasm at the beginning

of a project as exemplified by Lee Walker would appear to be both vitally effective and important to the eventual success or failure of the endeavor. It was this attitude of interest and enthusiasm that enabled Lee Walker to work her wonders at the Chicot County Library. The Kingwood Public Library, on the other hand, is a well-established library that nonetheless keeps its interest level high at all times. First, it makes sure the public knows it is there. It keeps people informed of its activities through many media; so there is little chance that anyone in town would fail to know what is going on in the library. Next, it brainstorms. It looks for ideas that will tickle public fancy and bring the library recognition. And last, but not least, it takes an interest in local activities and is ready to say "yes" to shared opportunities. The Kingwood Public Library, with its high tenor of public relations activity, has a unique persona. Not every library or every librarian would want to be so much in the thick of everything. Still, its activities are quite simple and down to earth. The librarians of Pascagoula, MS, were rewarded for daring to think big. Certainly, their fine arts project was something they had an interest in, and that interest emboldened them to set their sights high. One might say Washburn Memorial Library, which received a tidy bequest from the grateful aviator, simply had a windfall; but even in the receipt of this unsolicited gift, interest played a role. The title of the article, "Librarian's kindness brings library a winged blessing," shows this librarian took an interest in her patrons. In these four examples we see interest: at the beginning, in the long stretch, and in the humblest moment. Clearly, keeping the spark of interest alive is fundamental to any success.

Assessment

Assessment is important at many levels. The four Illinois rural libraries that put together a cooperative collection development policy first made thorough examinations of their individual collections, then met to share their findings and assess their collective strengths and weaknesses. They were careful to put everything in writing to be sure the agreement was clear to all. Another kind of assessment was performed in the two Illinois libraries that joined in community development projects. Each library director had to find out what was happening in the community and who was involved. Then each had to continue her assessment as the library became one of the participants in the community. From a broader perspective, Geneseo and Mount Morris were the beneficiaries of the Institute for Rural Affairs and the Illinois State Library's assessment of libraries in that state, which led to recognition of the opportunity and need for library involvement in the community. Assessment gives the library a clear understanding of what has to be done.

Initiative

If no one makes a start, nothing happens. Initiative for projects often begins with one person. In Gretna, it took an energetic library director and an active library foundation to be the spark plugs. Then the citizens came forward. In Modoc County, CA, a few individuals organized a grass roots movement that brought voters together and made library funding a reality. In Salzhhausen, good fortune certainly played a role in a small library's success, but individual initiative made the decisive difference. Catharina Schulz showed a remarkable drive and enthusiasm, recalling that she had to convince local officials not only to move on the opportunity to establish a municipal library, but that she, a foreigner, was the one to take the helm. In Seminole, FL, the library director was an energetic woman who was willing to bring the library's case to city officials. Kingwood Public Library constantly makes new initiatives, keeping an active public relations front, being ready to say "yes" to opportunities, and actively seeking new ideas and projects.

Mary Maggio's creation of a teenage activities group required courage, commitment, interest, creativity, good judgment, and management skills, not to mention hard work, persistence, faith in young persons, and a loving and caring hand. While all of these were important factors in her successful venture, none of it would have happened if she had not trusted her initial decision to try it out. Nearly everybody has had the experience of a feeling inside that says: "This time it's my turn." Mary Maggio faced her own doubts, others' doubts, and continued to believe that building up the teen group was worthwhile. She kept at it and found a successful outcome. The youth benefited, the library benefited, and the community benefited. Initiative is like that: one person has to say to herself, "This time it's my turn."

Getting Help

In Gretna, Nebraska's initial opposition to local-funding measures gave way to integral cooperation once work on the new library began. As in Gretna, the librarians of Pascagoula, MS, were surprised and happy to find that once they had begun building a fine arts collection for the new library, the community was happy to respond with time, effort and money. Once somebody gets an idea off the ground, people often will pitch in. In Salzhhausen, Germany Catharina Schulz did not fail to ask for and receive help. Her husband helped her write a software program for library automation. Her volunteer staff essentially ran the library under her direction. She got assistance from the regional library center. Help can come from many

quarters. Geneseo and Mount Morris Libraries owed part of their community involvement success to strong advocates, the Illinois Institute for Rural Affairs and the Illinois State Library, who were there in tough times to take a hard look at the situation and come up with a plan. Getting help from others multiplies our efforts and gives our work added depth and dimension.

Planning

The new Alice M. Farr Library in Aurora, NE, was a fine example of the need for planning. Even though it was a small building project, it required: 1) An agreement on funding from the city council, 2) Establishment of a foundation to support the endeavor, 3) Selection of an architectural firm, 4) A search for outside funding, 5) Selection of the building site, and 6) Supervision of the move. None of these steps was simple in itself and each required its own set of plans. Recall Indian Rocks Beach Public Library in Florida, where a new children's room was built without electrical outlets. Cooperative ventures show a maximum of planning. Libraries that have thought to join in cooperative projects already have planning in mind. The rural collection cooperative in Eastern Illinois required meeting after meeting, and each phase of development was put in writing. The results were clear: finding materials was easy, and interlibrary loans moved faster. The "village collection" scheme in Suffolk, England, called for a detailed plan, even though the stock rotation was fairly simple when carried out. Plans that led to its overall success included proper collection sizing and selection of books as well as working out the rotation process. Recall that use statistics were kept once the rotation began, allowing for assessment of the project's success and for modifications, had the plan fallen short of expectations. Collective cataloging projects also require planning, so individual cataloging policies can be discussed. Only then can a collective policy be agreed on. Planning is essential for complex projects and group efforts, but even small projects fare better if thought is given to the goals and steps along the way.

Knowledge and Learning

Knowledge of the library profession and willingness to learn as necessary to improve library conditions bring grace to all projects and situations. In the case of the Modoc County Library in Northern California, a small group of library supporters found a means to obtain funding. This required learning how a legal district could be formed for voting purposes and then going through the legal steps. What makes Modoc's case especially inter-

esting is laypersons had to learn legal procedures. Groups and individuals who are willing to put a foot forward are often surprised to find such a process fairly simple. Unfortunately, many people are held back by legal-sounding terms and even by the thought of dealing with law or government. Unfortunate indeed, because often it is quite easy. Learning gave Lee Walker part of the leverage she needed to succeed in the Chicot County Library. She learned about her community and enrolled in an MLS program to learn about the profession. Enthusiasm and learning enabled her to interact within the community and the state. While everyone expects doctors and engineers to have vital professional knowledge, they often fail to realize librarians, and all professionals, possess important professional knowledge and understanding. Librarians must become firm in their determination to acquire and exercise this knowledge and take every opportunity to correct public understanding. Catharina Schulz had both her formal education in librarianship and 10 years of library experience in Australia. How else could she have hoped to convince city officials in Salzhausem to entrust her with Dr. Denckmann's sizable gift and allow her to turn it into the town's first municipal library? Learning and professionalism were shunned in Indian Rocks Beach. City officials seemed to have fixed notions about how they wanted the library run. Their ideas were certain to influence all efforts on behalf of the library. Without proper guidance, the library was unable to grow and prosper. Cooperative projects require another kind of learning: familiarity with partners. When librarians agree to cooperative cataloging, familiarity and trust are paramount. (A cataloger is as protective of his/her cataloging as a mother bear is of her cub!) Knowledge and learning lend dignity and uplift to librarians efforts. It should also be clear by now that in many ways, they are simply essential.

Cooperative Efforts

Cooperation was apparent in every successful account I found. From volunteers and ad hoc citizens groups to formal cooperative projects, success depended on cooperative efforts. Islanders from Scotland built book shelters and ferried books to their neighbors. Residents of Modoc County, California came out and voted to be taxed (!) so their public library could remain open. The First United Methodist Church Library in Huntsville, Texas, and the new municipal library in Salzhausem, Germany, developed projects with local school libraries and nearby health care institutions. In Gretna, Nebraska and Seminole, Florida citizens who had originally opposed new libraries came out and gave their support. The Kingwood Public Library in West Virginia made cooperation within the community one of its routine library functions. In Illinois, Geneseo and Mount Morris Libraries found that by cooperating with local businesses, they could begin

to change economic conditions in their communities. And cooperatives like those in Eastern Illinois; Suffolk, England; Cape Cod, MA; and Pinellas County, FL, show the library profession has begun to take formal cooperative ventures as part of its daily reality.

Conclusion

My purpose in choosing this topic, "Growth and Vitality for Small Libraries," was to see if there were other success stories like the one I originally had read. What I found was small libraries in all parts of the country and around the world have had success in many ways. On the other hand, other small libraries have had no sparkling success story to tell. Some are confronted by unyielding circumstances, economic and otherwise. Others may feel themselves to be moving in an uninspiringly fixed path. I hope the stories in the first half of this paper have swept readers into feeling that success comes easily. I hope that looking over my analysis of the "elements of success" has heightened this impression - to the point that each reader is now saying, "I can do that!"

While we know that success really does not come easily, hearing about others' fruitful efforts, seeing how they did it, and knowing that there is a pattern that favors good results can make us willing to try. And who knows, success may come easily after all.

Notes

- ¹ Sandra Fuhr, "Small-Town Dreamers Build \$1.8-Million Community Library," *American Libraries* 27 (November 1996): 34-37.
- ² Janet Ostdiek, "Unofficial Friends Group at the Gretna Public Library," *Nebraska Library Association Quarterly* 23 (Summer 1992): 18-19.
- ³ Alice Burling, "Alice M. Farr Library," *Nebraska Library Association Quarterly* 23 (spring, 1992): 8.
- ⁴ Grant Butchart, "Far from the Madding Crowd," *Scottish Libraries* 10 (May/June 1996): 11.
- ⁵ North State Cooperative Library System, Willows, CA. (*Internet: nscls.library.net*.) Telephone conversation in September, 1997 with Jim Kirks, director.
- ⁶ Telephone conversation in September 1997 with Fay Stahl, a volunteer at the Modoc County Library in Alturas, CA.
- ⁷ *The Mello-Roos Community Facilities Act of 1982 (Amended)* provides for the formation of legal districts. Resolution No. 88-38 of

- the Board of Supervisors of the County of Modoc proposed that all of Modoc county be regarded as a (Mello-Roos) district. A copy of Resolution No. 88-38 appears in the Appendix.
- 8 Lee P. Walker, "Confessions of a Lay Librarian," *Arkansas Libraries* 48 (December 1992): 17-20.
 - 9 Catharina Schulz, "Bringing Library Automation to a Small German Town," *LASIE: Information bulletin of the Library Automation Systems Information Exchange* 25, nos. 4&5 (1995): 90-92.
 - 10 Ronald J. Getz, "A tale of Two Libraries," *American Libraries* 24 (February 1993): 142-43.
 - 11 "Small Library, Big Ideas," *American Libraries* 25 (December 1994): 978.
 - 12 "Small Libraries Make it Big," *Wilson Library Bulletin* 69 (October 1994): 31-33.
 - 13 Ruth Shasteen, "Cooperative Collection Among Four Rural Libraries," *Illinois Libraries* 74 (January 1992): 17-20.
 - 14 Phil Halliwell, "Village Collection - Refreshing Small Library Bookstock," *Public Library Journal* 10, no. 2 (1995): 46.
 - 15 Margaret A. Rioux, "PLA President's Series — Promises, Pitfalls, and Proposals: Automating Small Public Library Cataloging in a Consortium," *Public Libraries* 30, no. 4 (1991): 226-231.
 - 16 Joel W. Beane, "An Expansion of Public Awareness Through Involvement in Special Projects — A Successful Experiment at the Kingwood Public Library," *West Virginia Libraries* 37 no. 4 (1984): 8-11.
 - 17 N. Walzer and J. Gruidl, "The Role of Small Public Libraries in Community Economic Development," *Illinois Libraries* 78 (Winter 1996): 61-64.
 - 18 Jane C. Bryan, "Community Involvement Proves Successful," *Mississippi Libraries* 55, no. 1 (1991): 6.
 - 19 Mary Maggio, "Romancing the Young Teen," *Voice of Youth Advocates* 18, no. 6 (1996): 360-67.
 - 20 Edith McCormick, "Librarian's Kindness Brings Library a Winged Blessing," *American Libraries* 26 (March 1995): 212
 - 21 Archibald Macleish, *Essays and Addresses on Librarianship* [compiled by Eva Goldschmidt], (Chicago: American Library Association, 1971): x-xi.

Appendix

RESOLUTION NO. 88-38 OF THE BOARD OF SUPERVISORS OF THE COUNTY OF MODOC (A RESOLUTION TO FORM COMMUNITY FACILITIES DISTRICT NO. ONE PURSUANT TO THE MELLO-ROOS COMMUNITY FACILITIES ACT OF 1982 AS AMENDED)

BE IT HEREBY RESOLVED by the Board of Supervisors, of the County of Modoc, State of California, that:

WHEREAS, the ability to read is essential to the democratic process; and

WHEREAS, a library system is essential to the provision of a public education; and

WHEREAS, reduced revenues have forced the reduction of library services and the limitations upon this Board to raise revenues does further threaten the provisions of library services within Modoc County; and

WHEREAS, a Public Hearing was duly held on the establishment of said District July 18, 1988 at 10:00 a.m. during a regularly scheduled meeting of this Board with no protest of any kind, written or oral, being presented; now, therefore,

1. This Board finds that the special tax to be levied pursuant to paragraphs (5) and (6) below has not been eliminated by a majority protest pursuant to Section 53324 of the Act and that all proceedings were valid and in conformity with the Act as amended;
2. A community facilities district is hereby established under the terms of Chapter 2.5 of the above Act, the boundaries of which district are to be identical with the existed boundaries of Modoc County;
3. The name of said district shall be "Community Facilities District No. One";
4. The public facilities and services to be financed by this district pursuant to Chapter 2.5 of the above Act are a full-service library system serving all of the residents of Modoc County and sufficient to qualify for participation in the North State Cooperative Library System, the California Literacy Campaign, California Public Library funding, and other state and federal funding;
5. Except where funds are otherwise available, a special tax sufficient to pay for all facilities and services shall be annually levied within the district boundaries pending a vote of the people approving of such levy as stated in paragraph (6) below. The rate of the special tax shall be \$18.00 per annum to be collected at the same time and in the same manner as taxes on real property except that each landowner shall pay an annual and maximum amount of \$18.00 per annum regardless of the number of land parcels owned. Funds raised by this special tax are to be dedicated to the provision of full library services pursuant to the business of the proposed district.
6. The procedure for voting on the proposed levy of this special tax shall be in accordance with regular voting procedures and shall be submitted by this Board to the qualified electors of the proposed Community Facilities District One during the general election to be held on November 8, 1988.

If the election is to be held less than 125 days following the close of the public hearing, then the concurrence of the elections official conducting the election shall be obtained. The vote shall be by the registered voters residing within the boundaries of the above proposed district with each voter having one vote. The above special tax shall be levied by the Modoc County Assessor and collected by the Modoc County Tax Collector upon two-thirds of the votes being cast upon the question of levying the above special tax are in favor of levying that tax.

PASSED AND ADOPTED By the Board of Supervisors of the County of Modoc at a regular meeting of said Board, held on the 1st day of August, 1988, by the following vote of said Board:

AYES: Supervisors Schreiber, Anderson, Chace, Coulson and Jones

NOES: None

ABSENT: None

By: Lesley J. Chace, Chairman of the Board of Supervisors.
Maxine Madison, Clerk of the Board of Supervisors.