The Rural Library: Programs, Services, and Community Coalitions and Networks

By Linda Johnson

Rural people have many of the same economic and job concerns as those who live in the cities and suburbs. They also share the need to understand international and national current events and how their lives will be affected. Cultural interests, too, are similar.

"Rural Americans have historically been undeserved by the public library in almost every aspect. Yet there is much evidence that shows that Americans residing in rural and small communities value libraries, and when conveniently located, make more frequent use of the library than do city dwellers" (Smith, 1959). This is as true today as it was in 1959, perhaps more so.

Librarians know how to provide good library service to rural Americans. There is no shortage of know-how. Librarians are amazingly resourceful and endlessly creative. Budget constraints have the effect of spurring librarians on to provide ever-better programming and services with less and less money. That is not to say that this is how it should be.

Programs and Services: A Historical And Modern Perspective

What are the types of programs and services offered by rural and small libraries? There is actually an amazing variety of resourceful and inventive programs designed to meet the needs of users in each particular library's service area. It is important to remember that any services, materials, and programs must be of interest to all age groups from cradle to 100 years plus.

Services To Groups

To meet the needs of groups such as service clubs and community organizations some libraries have a program planning service. Through this service, club chairs are regularly informed about local resources for their own programs, as well as library programs. Discussion leaders or facilitators, speakers, exhibits, films—the list is long.

At one time, one library system offered an annual institute for community leaders. Specially trained individuals were invited from the nearby uni-

versity to help local politicians, club officers, and interested citizens master new techniques in cooperative services. This helps to strengthen a community and raises the visibility of the library as a vital community resource (Smith, 1959).

One unusual service was implemented by a library working with a men's civic group. The club purchased a number of ceiling projectors and a collection of projected books. The equipment and books were stored at the library. Librarians assisted in the selection of books for the collection. Club members and librarians (in bookmobiles) regularly visited invalids and shut-ins, leaving the equipment on temporary loan (Smith, 1959). This same library sponsored several informal discussion series. Members of civic groups planned or selected programs of interest to members. Programs included Great Books, international affairs, mental health, child development, and others. The library also supplied study materials to be used along with the discussions.

Long-distance service is used in many rural communities where there is no real library service. The user calls in or sends requests for books and other materials, which are then mailed from a central location. Some libraries rely on package delivery services or even Greyhound buses. When the user has finished with the materials, he or she then mails them back. The only cost to the user is postage, which is sometimes absorbed by the library.

In the '30s and '40s rural discussion groups made frequent use of bookmobiles. These vehicles sometimes remained on the road for five days or more, making stops at schools, farmhouses, grocery stores, and [even] lending books to individuals along the roads.

Granges, Farm Bureaus, the Farm Union and other rural organizations also formed discussion groups, using books supplied by the county library. They made use of other materials, including records, pictures and films. Often the homes and offices of officers of rural organizations and agencies were used as "lending centers" or branches for the library.

Some parent-education classes met in the library. Library materials such as films added enrichment to their programs" (Farmer's Bulletin No. 1847, 1949).

Schools

In several hundred rural areas, schools were used as branch libraries, extensions of the county or regional library. In some cases a bookmobile served as both a public library and a school library. Besides books, pictures, records, 16 mm films, pamphlets, magazines, and maps were available for circulation (Farmer's Bulletin No. 1847, 1949).

Lifelong Learning and Literacy

Individuals whose education was interrupted were able to resume learning with guidance from the library. The Oregon State Library developed such a program during the Depression to help young adults to continue their education when they were forced to leave school to support families. The program grew and the scope was broadened to include anyone interested in self-education. Thousands of young people took advantage of and used the Oregon State Library's 'prescriptive reading' lists and courses designed to 'lead' a student from little or no knowledge of a subject to a broader understanding [of the world] (Farmer's Bulletin No. 1847, 1949).

Bookmobiles Plus

You might say that some bookmobile librarians are actually heroic in the services they provide. Heat, cold, foul weather, nothing stops the dedicated librarian from making the required stops. And eager users are not deterred either. Bookmobiles came in all guises. In Northern Georgia, a Jeep brought library services to remote mountain communities. Librarians have delivered books on horseback or by mule. In some regions of the world, elephants and camels take the place of powered vehicles.

Even today the prime focus of rural library service remains the bookmobile. Bookmobiles used today are adapted for use by the handicapped. Many bookmobiles are now capable of providing a full range of library services, including reference services that utilize the latest computer technologies. Traditional library services such as children's programming and book collections remain just as important now as in the past.

Agricultural Extension Programs

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) extension services offers programs to libraries upon request and will provide copies of their publications. It appears that most cooperation is informal and initiated by the librarian (Boyce, 1995).

The Library and the Community

From the earliest days of public library service, both individuals and organized groups have promoted the value of the library. "Informal organized support of libraries is also not new" (Farmer's Bulletin No. 1847, 1949). In fact, many public libraries had their origins through civic organizations such

as women's clubs, Rotary, Kiwanis, and other groups. In some communities, groups were able to obtain special tax levies, increased appropriations, worked to pass bond issues for buildings, and lobbied for better library legislation. These organizations included women's clubs, service clubs, Parent–Teacher Associations, voter's leagues, unions, and many more. Then, as now, librarians worked closely with these groups and were often members. In this way, community cooperation was and is cultivated and developed, increasing the visibility of the library in the eyes of the community.

Friends of the Library

Friends of the Library groups are organized specifically to function as a fund-raising organization and as direct supporters of the library's programs and services.

Community Coalitions Today

Community coalitions must be developed and maintained if today's libraries are going to continue to be relevant in their communities. If they are not already doing so, librarians must begin to communicate with city government, no matter how small the library and city. Contacts with civic organizations and service clubs still provide much needed support, and often, funding for special programs and services that the library might otherwise be unable to provide. Librarians must leave the building and get out into the community where they can be seen and heard. They have an obligation to speak out at club meetings, and introduce themselves to community movers and shakers, local politicians and those individuals that make things happen. Ask for their support and offer yours. The library may have something that someone else needs, meeting space, equipment, information. The other group or organization may respond with funding or in-kind contributions. "Do not fail to involve the community!" The library simply cannot anymore remain isolated and aloof (Case, 1994).

Outreach Services In Rural Libraries Today

According to Judith and Bert Boyce, (1995), "Outreach is the only means by which library services can be effectively distributed over rural areas." They continue by saying, "Rural areas are served by national information agencies, state information agencies, the libraries of colleges and universities, and by local public libraries—all using outreach methods. Particular efforts have been made to support distance learning activities and

health information needs, and it is these areas that new technology has been most prevalent".

"Most service is still provided by small public libraries, branches, or bookmobiles and by deposit collections and books by mail programs" (Boyce, 1995). However electronic and digital technologies are having a noticeable effect on how information and services are being delivered to rural library users. The current trend of retirees and the well-to-do moving into rural spaces is also changing the way rural libraries develop library collections and plan and implement new services which may be required by these aging and wealthier populations (Boyce, 1995).

John Philip, (1994) has expressed concern about today's libraries and their ability to reach out into the community in the face of drastic budget cuts and the new directions and new outlooks "precipitated by the tumultuous '60s and '70s." Librarians today must deal with latchkey children, the homeless, and the growing trend of homeschooling. It is also necessary to consider those communities whose schools do not have libraries of their own. This is a particular problem in California where, until recently, there was an average of one certified school librarian per 6,000 children. In addition, the impact of new technologies, including the Internet, and the implications they have for libraries and their communities must be considered.

People want and need different things. What is it that they need? What do they want? Perhaps most people when asked this question would respond, "People need information. They want answers to their questions." However, this may not necessarily be true. According to Bernard Vavrek, people apparently do not make use of the library primarily for the purposes of obtaining information, preferring instead to turn first to a professional, (but not a librarian), an acquaintance, friend or relative, and finally to "use the public library" (Vavrek, 1990).

The public library is one of many attractions competing for the time and attention of individuals and families. What can or should libraries do to remain viable and active in their communities? What are some of the needs that could be met by libraries?

Social Needs

John Berry claims that "only 30 to 50 percent of potential [library] users are being served" (Berry, 1989). Who are these potential users? They are the homeless, latchkey children, the poor, the working mother, the unemployed, the illiterate, the mentally ill, the handicapped, the minorities. All of these are from traditionally under served groups. "Today, minorities are becoming majorities, the population is aging, and the family unit is being fractured"

(Bell, 1993). Changes must be made in our methods of delivering services and programs to these people.

Whether or not anyone cares to admit or acknowledge it, "there is a[n] underclass who will never realize the American Dream" (Berry, 1989).

"Give people what they want and need, not what we want them to have" (Robinson, 1994).

"Determine what the real needs are" (Vavrek, 1991).

"Tear down barriers to access" (Panz, 1991).

"Take illiteracy seriously" (Kozol, 1992).

Librarians everywhere are working under sometimes arduous conditions to bring the library to those who cannot get to it, for whatever reason.

What Are Outreach Services?

Philip, (1994) defines outreach to include:

- Branches and bookmobiles
- Bookmobiles (and mobile service in all of its forms)
- Books by Mail services
- Services to the homebound
- Deposit collections
- Institutional services—including nursing homes, retirement homes and villages, and prisons
- Services to other libraries
- Social Service Agencies, homeless shelters, women's safety shelters, motels and hotels
- Schools, alternative schools, juvenile group homes, and group residences for mentally and physically challenged
- Businesses and Chambers of Commerce
- Residence homes for abused and neglected children
- Service Clubs and civic organizations
- Agricultural Extensions and Braille Centers

Outreach attempts, in order to be successful, need to entice users into the library, draw them in, and then tempt them to keep coming .However, Philip rightly argues that "individuals and families who use outreach services are as important as those who come into the library building" (Philip,1994). Their needs are acute. "Perhaps," Philip opines, "there is added value to such service."

Outreach and Community Coalitions: Some Innovative Library Services and Programs

The Grapevine Project at Crooks County Library, Prineville, Oregon, used LSCA funds granted by the Oregon State Library to identify and document local community members with knowledge, skills, and experience beyond the ordinary, which could be shared with other members of the community. Bingham calls them "human resources" but notes that "members of the community tend not to see themselves or anyone else as potential information sources." (Bingham, 1993).

Does it work as a source of information? Said one librarian, "As a reference tool the people resources are another vital source of information" (Bingham, 1993). The project was considered moderately successful and was fully integrated into the library's reference services in 1994.

Literacy and Information Literacy Programs

Ann Scales, (1986) notes that "the public library [in its earliest form] preceded the public school by a considerable number of years." Public libraries have been offering alternative education to adults since the 1960s. An American Library Association (ALA) study conducted in 1965 by Bernice McDonald found that 15 public libraries were offering services to adult illiterates. In 1978, 88 local library programs were reported. In 1979, the ALA Office of Outreach Services conducted workshops to train librarians in techniques of teaching basic literacy skills to undereducated adults. "By early 1981, participants in the original workshops had trained almost 900 other librarians" (Scales, 1986). Reports Scales, "Involvement in literacy programs is based on the premise that all community members are entitled to library services."

Literacy programs provide a means for the nonreader to learn or relearn those basic reading skills missed, for whatever reason, during early school days" (Scales, 1986).

"Literacy is the first step in lifelong learning. From that point, one can move on to GED programs, and even on to college if that is their desire" (Scales, 1991).

What better place than the library to base lifelong learning and literacy programs? In the library, there is a learning environment and the special collections needed by the new reader. There is access to information, appropriate reference tools, and various collections for recreational reading. A library that offers literacy services becomes associated with learning—and with pleasure and a sense of accomplishment.

Humanities Programs

Funding is available from a number of sources, most notably the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) and National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) for fine programming of many varieties. Yet, even superlative programs may fail if you do not include the community in planning activities. Librarians need to involve the community–local residents and organizations—in all aspects of the planning and implementation of humanities programming.

Even the smallest of rural libraries may present outstanding programs that are very well-attended. For example, Flagler Colorado Community Library is located in a remote mountain region near Denver. Six hundred people reside in Flagler. Their library, which contains 5,300 volumes, operates on a budget of less that $2,000 per year. It is open five hours per week. When it presented its first humanities program–actually its first-ever public program—one-half of the community attended. Three hundred and thirty people attended the library's second program, which had to be moved into the local movie theater. How did they do it? They involved their community in planning, from the beginning stages to implementation. They built on the desires of the local residents to take part and worked to sustain that interest. The lesson here is that community residents must be persuaded to want programming so badly that they will donate time, money, and facilities, to fulfill that desire (Coval, 1986).

What are some steps to take to ensure the success of library programs? First of all, working committees should represent and reflect the community in all of its diversity. Service clubs, fraternal organizations, businesses, (including the Chamber of Commerce), and the local school system, including private schools, can all contribute to the success of the program. And, of course, the community should be involved in the actual programs as well. Attendance will be enlarged by family and friends, and neighbors will want to view someone they are acquainted with.

Packaged programs, which take on a variety of formats, are appealing to rural and small libraries. They are usually less expensive to present, easier to arrange for and are less complicated to apply for. However, they still require a substantial commitment of time and energy. The results are worth it!

"Discussion and dialogue are an important part of humanities programs. The opportunity to participate in such activities has great appeal to a population that may feel somewhat isolated in a remotely located community. Those who attend will also have an opportunity to interact with their neighbors, with the scholar/speaker and with the librarians" (Coval, 1986).

Books By Mail

Imagine that you live in a remote region, say the desert areas of Arizona or New Mexico. The nearest library is located in a small town almost 50

miles away. You resign yourself to giving up the luxury of borrowing books to read to pass the time. Then you learn about the library's Books By Mail program. This is an outreach program that may work in the following manner:

- A catalog of books is produced by the library consisting of 50-800 titles
- Most titles are current paperbacks
- The service is publicized and the catalogs are mailed to potential users
- Users select titles that appeal to them and send in an order card. Some libraries take phone orders.
- The library mails the books to the user in a reusable container, paying postage both ways.
- After reading the books, users return them to the library with a new order.

Books by Mail services became wide-spread in the 1960s. The Wenatchee, Washington North Central Regional Library is credited with organizing "the first comprehensive mail order program" (Kim, 1973). The service grew in popularity in the 1970s and '80s as an alternative to bookmobiles and other extension services. Seventy-five programs existed by 1975. Why is the Books By Mail so successful? Who benefits from the programs?

Books By Mail:

- is an alternative service when bookmobiles proved too costly;
- is a backup system in emergency situations;
- provides services to the elderly, handicapped, and homebound;
- provides services to rural populations;
- is an inducement to small communities to establish local libraries; and
- is a community relations program (Kim, 1975)

Youth Services and Programs

In many rural libraries, the director is responsible for all services to children and youth. A staff member or volunteer may conduct programs but it is up to the director to select books for storytimes. In most rural libraries, service to children is a fundamental component. Most offer storytimes, summer reading programs, and other special events for children. Often, circulation figures for children's books and other materials are a significant segment of the totals. But if librarians with master's degrees are rare in rural libraries, children's specialists are almost nonexistent. For example, in

Montana there were only six professional children's librarians in 1994 (Walters, 1994). Sixth-two percent of New York's public libraries serve rural populations. Ninety percent of these have no librarian with a master's degree. There are no figures for children's librarians in rural New York (Wigg, 1995).

"Almost 75 percent of rural libraries surveyed indicated that they provide services for children which are regarded as 'traditional,' including but not limited to, "storyhours, preschool storytimes, reference and reader's advisory, summer reading clubs, and an excellent book collection" (Naylor, 1993).

Library Services for Young Children

Preschool children and their parents are among the library's best and most loyal customers. In many rural areas parents find that the library and its programs are the only community institution that has free resources and materials selected especially with the needs of young children in mind. The library may have the only public collection of materials for both children and their caregivers. The public library also offers opportunities for young children to interact with youngsters their own age and skills level. Sparsely populated rural areas often lack other facilities for young children.

"The vital importance of the public library to the development of learning skills directly supports the first of the National Goals for Education: By the year 2000, all children in America will start school ready to learn" (ALA 1991).

Library services that support National Goals for Education include:

- Programs for toddlers and preschoolers
- A positive environment for developing the social skills necessary for formal education
- Support and materials for parents and adult caregivers
- Literacy programs for parents
- Help for parents in preparing their children for reading

Federal Head Start programs give the neediest children in rural areas an opportunity for learning experiences that will enrich their lives. The Library-Head Start Partnership Project is intended to demonstrate how libraries can work with Head Start agencies to strengthen children's learning and parent involvement in children's literacy and language development (Wigg, 1995).

Another innovative program that connects parents and caregivers with library resources and literature for preschoolers is a three-part series of parent workshops that presents parents with information about the best books for young children, and other information on the hows and whys of reading to

babies and toddlers. Parents learn songs, fingerplays, and other techniques that make books fun for children. The workshops are facilitated by trained professionals and have been presented to caregivers, teen parents, and Head Start parents (Wigg,1995).

Library-sponsored programs may be held in the library, at daycare sites, Head Start facilities, and other locations. It is the link between the library and the participants that is so essential to rural parents who may have no other agency to turn to, to help their children on the road to lifelong learning.

Family Literacy

In 1994, the American Library Association (ALA) began the last year of a three-year literacy project for rural communities in Louisiana. The Viburnum/ALA Rural Family Literacy Project is a program designed to develop and enhance family literacy programs. By September 1994, six rural public libraries received $3,000 grants to continue the programs which connects librarians and education and literacy specialists working to improve the reading skills of families. Literacy "teams," consisting of librarians, Head Start coordinators, and school board members, attend training seminars "in order to learn [basic and] creative strategies for the development of library-based family literacy programs and to provide reading instruction for parents who lack reading skills" (Wigg, 1995).

Beyond the Basics: Innovative Reference Services

Most, if not all, rural libraries provide some sort of basic reference services. This may involve helping users to find answers to their information needs, providing names, addresses, telephone numbers and so on. However, some libraries go beyond the basics and offer unique programs to meet the special information needs of their rural communities. Five rural New York libraries have made homework easier and more fun with the use of multimedia computers. "BLAST-Books, Libraries, and Students Teamup" was established with the aid of funds from an LSCA Homework Center Grant. Volunteers were recruited to work with youth in grades four through eight. Homework and research booklets were printed for use by students. Survey forms were designed to help evaluate the effectiveness of the program. Libraries used the computers to create homework centers. The project was promoted through cooperative efforts with local schools (Wigg, 1995).

Many libraries deal with the problem of kids who have nowhere to go after school because of working parents or other reasons. "Homework centers in some rural libraries are seen as havens for latchkey children, kids at risk, and as a way to promote lifelong learning" (Brewer, 1992). For example, the Seaside Homework Center at the Seaside Branch of the Monterey County, CA Free Libraries includes four programs: a drop-in homework assistance service, library skills instruction, one-on-one tutoring, and Reading Partners, a program which pairs a trained tutor with a child who needs reading help" (Brewer, 1992).

Homeschoolers

There appears to be a significant increase in the number of families who have opted to educate their children at home. The reasons vary but thousands of families who are concerned about family values, religious concerns, violence, overcrowded classrooms, or poor school performance have pulled their children from traditional classroom settings and are establishing classrooms in their own homes. Some families who share similar values also pool resources and space and collaborate in the education of their children. Most children educated in this manner are ages 5-12, but often youth of junior and senior high level are taken from a public school and taught at home.

This trend has had a definite impact on public libraries. Parents who homeschool quite often use the public library as a source of learning materials. State-supplied lists of suggested learning and reading resources are often woefully out-of-date and unavailable from bookstores. While libraries may be able to supply the needed titles, the librarian ought to direct the parent-teacher to more up-to-date and appropriate information. Also, visiting the library and attending programs gives children and youth an opportunity to meet other children in social situations, something they may miss if they are educated at home. A welcoming atmosphere will encourage home schooling families to use the library and contribute to its programs. For example, home schooling parents may be a source of experienced help in conducting storytimes or they may have other expertise that would be useful to the library. Children are often encouraged to engage in some form of community service as a part of their curriculum.

Librarians must remember to inform home schooling parents of the basic services available for them in the library and of upcoming programs. Something else the librarian must remember is that homeschoolers tend to use the library at hours varying from those of traditionally educated youth. Service barriers to this kind of use may mean that the library is closed just when it is most convenient for these families to make a trip to the library for materials.

Collaboration With Public and Private Schools

Librarians would be wise to establish close ties with local schools, for this is how and where children learn about the library. Regular communication with teachers, and librarian visits to classrooms to conduct story programs and instruction, and to promote the library ought to be a part of the basic library programs of outreach.

Some schools and public libraries have combined efforts to better serve the community. While most collaboration consists of sharing some resources and alerting public librarians about upcoming school learning projects, other public and school libraries have actually established joint libraries in their communities. These combined school/public library ventures have met with varying degrees of success.

Summer reading programs in public libraries vary, but all have the goal of keeping children in the reading habit when school is out of session. Children who read during school breaks do better when school is in session. Most programs require children to read a certain number of books during the break or a set number of minutes per day. Break programs also give a child something to do, relieves boredom, and enhances learning. In addition, most libraries schedule crafts activities and may have special guest performers come to the library.

Many public libraries have the option of presenting programs organized by their state libraries. For example, Southern California librarians have participated in the planning and implementation of cooperative library programs for the past several years. Each year a committee meets to select a theme for the upcoming break programs. Once a theme is chosen, a graphic artist creates artwork that is voted on by participating libraries. Promotional items such as posters, bookmarks, booklogs, and other items are then designed and printed to be distributed to each library according to their needs. Funding is secured by grants from various organizations and foundations. Budgets are administered by each participating library system that is also responsible for ordering and distribution. Individual libraries notify the system representative as to which items are needed and in what amounts. Materials are delivered to each library in May. Costs are borne by library systems and individual libraries receive the items at no extra cost. This is a boon to the smaller, rural libraries whose budgets often cannot stretch to cover such luxuries as offset color printing and incentives. Libraries are free to plan programs that meet the needs of their young users.

Computer Literacy Programs

Young people are connecting with the world via computer at the rural library in many communities. New York State Library supports Project

GAIN (Global Access Information Network), a grant-funded project. New York provided Internet access and training to five rural libraries and one Indian Nation school. Training for public librarians and promotion of the information available on the Internet to the community was emphasized. Teachers were able to devise multiple uses for the information in their classrooms.

Help From State Libraries

A number of states provide children's services grants that assist rural libraries to initiate new services. Most require that professional librarians direct projects. In the case of rural libraries without a professional, the library system assumes this role (Schubert, 1994). Grants enable small libraries to provide support to families with children with learning disabilities, to develop family literacy programs and to develop parenting and preschool readiness activities which will bring isolated rural families to the library"(Schubert, 1994). Vermont and Oregon State Libraries also provide grant funding for library programs for children.

"Librarians in rural communities are often passionate about services to children [and youth], proud of their ability to furnish individualized services to young people and their families—at their best, rural libraries provide an opportunity for young people to receive personal attention . . ." (Stern, 1994). "What is needed [now]? A rural library action plan is needed in order to overcome the barriers which prevent rural librarians from making use of existing resources. The plan . . . would foster:

- more attention to the specific needs of rural children;
- analysis of the impact of poverty on rural children using libraries in rural communities;
- creation of national networks which allow rural librarians across the country to learn from each other;
- effective ways to provide professional knowledge about new developments in library service to rural libraries;
- the development of methods which achieve better documentation of service to children [and adults] in rural communities;
- the adaptation of planning methods for use in one-person libraries;
- the creation of clear, simple, manuals which outline services to young people;
- publicity about resources that already exist;
- national grant projects which enhance and highlight service in rural area;
- increased attention for rural libraries in national publications, forums, etc.

- increased support to rural librarians in rural communities that will be of benefit to both children and adults who use the nation's rural public libraries." (Wigg, 1995)

Alternative Services

The possibility of day care being a concern to public librarians was brought up at the Pennsylvania Region 14 Governor's Conference in May 1990. Librarians, by and large, reacted negatively. The involvement of public libraries in providing services to day care has been given impetus by a 1990 amendment to the Library Services and Construction Act (LSCA-Section 10, amendment to Section 101 of Title I). Briefly, the amendment states that money can be granted "for assisting libraries in providing mobile library services and programs to child-care providers or child-care center which are licensed or certified by the state or otherwise meet the requirements of State Law" (Congress of the United States, 1990).

Service ought to be provided to day care centers. However, librarians are unwilling to assume the role of day care providers. Ancillary care is already provided to latchkey children and not always happily by librarians. Shilts, (1993) claims that "provision of day care may lead to the elimination of a social problem, that of unattended latchkey children, and the library acting as an agent of community and social change." Certainly this is a worthy role for the library to assume. Shilts also cites economics as a another possible reason for the library to get involved in day care. Rural women who must work must also find affordable day care for their children. A third reason, Shilts posits, is that libraries should become involved in community day care arrangements is that each child and parent is a potential user. Each individual, child or adult, who comes into the library and has a positive experience becomes a library supporter.

Local and county governments now demand that libraries justify their very existence. What librarians know to be true about the importance of libraries to their communities must be proven, demonstrated, documented. Shilts emphasizes that "every opportunity must be taken to situate the library as a [viable, visible and] active partner in improving the community's welfare (Shilts, 1993).

The Beaumont Library District: A Model of Service

Youth Services

Beaumont Library District is a small library located in Beaumont, California. The library had provided inadequate service to the public, particularly to children, for years. A summer reading program was offered that was well-attended but when it was over for the summer the children stopped using the library until school was again in session in the fall. School classes used the public library to supplement their curriculum since they had no school library available to them. Service to preschool children amounted to nearly nothing. Occasionally a preschool teacher or daycare provider would bring a small group of children to the library for a storytime while books were selected to take back to their own facility. There was no plan of service for children under five years of age, despite the fact that many parents desired such a service.

In August 1990, the Beaumont Library District came under new management. For the first time in its history, the library was to be professionally directed. Library service to children came under scrutiny and many changes were initiated. The librarian, working with the Board of Trustees, established a new mission for the library and established goals and objectives for improved library services. One of the library's most important service goals now was to "act as a preschooler's door-to-learning, encouraging young children to develop an interest in reading and learning through services for children and for parents and children together."

The Youth Services Librarian made it a point to get out into the community with the message by attending numerous functions including "Week of the Young Child" celebrations, school fairs and meetings, club meetings and community gatherings to talk about the new programs. Each parent who enters the library with a small child is approached regarding their possible interest in bringing their preschool child to the library for storytimes. These programs are presented in the community room of the library. The librarian arranged with the directors of three Head Start Centers and three private daycare providers to visit the library on a weekly or biweekly basis. One local Head Start Center walks four groups of children to the library for stories twice a month. Several early childhood teachers come to the library regularly to select books to be used at their centers to support their early childhood curriculum. In January 1997, the Youth Services Department sponsored a two-day "Storytelling Workshop", conducted by professional storyteller Karen Rae Kraut. The program was well-attended by early childhood teachers.

The Youth Services Department also maintains close ties with Childhelp, USA, a facility for abused and neglected children, arranging visits to the library by residents and going to the facility to present story programs.

Summer Reading Programs

The Beaumont Library offers summer reading programs and activities for preschoolers and children ages 5-13. A member of the Inland Library System, the library participates in the Southern California cooperative summer reading program developed in 1992. This has been especially beneficial to this small library which suffered drastic cuts due to Proposition 13, the Homeowner's Tax Reduction Bill. Booklogs, bookmarks, bookbags and other materials are supplied to the library by the Inland Library System. Programming includes a children's reading program, a Read-To-Me program for preschoolers and a board game which is posted on the main bulletin board in the library. The board game is based upon the theme of the current reading program. Crafts and activities are offered for older children and preschool storytimes with appropriate activities entice children into the library for summer fun. One or two performers are usually invited to present programs to mixed groups of children and adults. Programs of note include the annual visit by Pacific Animal Productions, a Fallbrook, California-based group which brings exotic animals to the library for children to meet and enjoy.

Preschool Programs and Services

Tot-Time Storytimes and Activities for children ages 3-5 years are held at 10:30 a.m. on Wednesdays and Fridays in the community room of the library. Stories and activities are carefully planned so that the programs meet the goal of the library acting as a preschooler's door-to-learning. Basic concepts are introduced through fine literature and art presented in a lively manner appealing to young children. Videos, games, crafts and fingerplays reinforce concepts learned. The purpose of the program is to help prepare the young child for learning in school. Parents and care-givers are welcome to attend Tot-Time with children because it is important for adults to understand and learn how to read to young children and how to select appropriate books and other materials. To this end, the Youth Librarian has prepared a number of booklists and other guides on the selection and use of books and media with young children.

The library also serves several daycare providers both in the library and at primary sites. In addition, the Youth Librarian works closely with three

Head Start sites in Beaumont and a daycare center associated with a local church. These groups are served both in the library and at their sites. The Youth Librarian has also developed a working relationship with the Parks and Recreation District by providing library services to children enrolled in Noble Creek Park's Extended Daycare program.

The City of Beaumont also participates in Summer Reading Programs by sending a group of youth to the library for storytimes and activities. As is common these days, the library served more children through state and federally funded programs such as ABC State Preschool and Head Start and private daycare programs than individual families. This seems to be a trend that has continued for a number of years in many libraries.

Juvenile Programs

Youth Services meets the reading needs of children ages 5-12 in several ways. Summer reading programs provide activities and opportunities for pleasure reading without the pressure of competing for grades. There are not many recreational activities for children available in the Beaumont area at low cost and summer programs are enthusiastically attended.

Youth Services strives to maintain close ties with the Beaumont Unified School District. In recent years, school classes have not visited the library on a regular basis, preferring to rely on their own school library media centers for materials related to their curricula. In early June, the Youth Librarian visits elementary classrooms at three schools to alert students and teachers to the library's programs for youth. During each visit, the librarian discusses library programs, gives a brief lesson on library use, and reads or tells a story. A packet of materials including handout sheets, bookmarks, library card applications and a homework alert package are put together for each teacher. As a result, many children and parents have come to the library to obtain library cards and some calls have been received from teachers with advance notice of class assignments.

Each September, the Youth Services Department conducts a library card sign-up campaign for first graders. The librarian visits classrooms to introduce the library to these children. In October, the youth librarian presents a workshop for teen moms and their infants. The importance of early experiences with books and reading is emphasized along with tips on selecting and using good books with very young children. Thirty young women from Esperanza Alternative High School attend the workshop. The teens are given packets of helpful materials and invited back to use the library on their own. The annual Halloween Howl closes out the month of October. Nifty Thrifty, the local Soroptimist Club thrift shop provides hats, fancy clothing, shoes and jewelry for the children to fashion their own

costumes. Face painting completes the transformations. Children are invited to wear the costumes home.

The annual Tot-Time Birthday Party is held on the first Wednesday in January. Children play games and enjoy birthday stories and refreshments. In February, the annual Valentine Party finds children (and moms, dads and grandparents too), enjoying the making of valentines to take home.

A new program for children was initiated at the library on March 2, 1998, the birthday of the venerable Dr. Seuss. The National Education Association working with the estate of the late author launched *Read Across America Day*. Adults are encouraged to set aside March 2 to read with children. Let Loose with Dr. Seuss was the program designed for the Beaumont Library. Also held in March is the annual *Green Eggs and Ham* Program for youngsters. The Dr. Seuss story is recounted in books and video formats and children are served a brunch of boiled eggs, dyed green, and ham sandwiches. Springtime programs are held for children in April.

Schools

The Youth Librarian makes a number of visits to elementary classrooms in the Beaumont School District. In late May 1998, the librarian was contacted by Dorothy Brown of the Food Services Program of the school district and invited to participate in the summer feeding program. The Cruise 'n' Cuisine Bus rolled into the parking lot of the library on each Tuesday and Thursday at noon and children were treated to food for thought as well as the stomach. Children ages 1-18 years enjoyed a free lunch served by the food services dietitian while the Youth Librarian presented a story-time. Children listened to stories, accompanied by music, on the front lawn of the library. More than 900 children attended the feeding program/story-times. Ninety-seven children and adults attended one program in July when the temperature was 109 degrees at 11 am. Cruise'n'Cuisine proved to be the most popular extended children's program presented to date.

Lifelong Learning and Literacy

In 1992, the Beaumont Library applied for and received grant funding for the implementation of an adult literacy program. Dr. LaVergne Rosow was hired to design a unique program based upon her expertise as a teacher of adult learners. The program was based upon the theory that learners had undergone life experiences which had made it difficult for them to learn to read in school. Also, a basis for the program was the thought that whole literature programs were more effective than the programmed approaches used in the Laubach Program. Dr. Rosow believed that positive early

experiences with books in the home is the key to becoming a literate adult, a point of view shared by many experts in the field of language and literature. Prospective tutors undergo a 12-hour training session orienting them to the specific needs of adult learners. To date, the program has been quite successful. Beaumont High School Academy, a group of students planning to enter the education field, have also benefited from the library's expertise in literary programming. Students are instructed in learning strategies that will help them in their upcoming college careers. Front Porch Stories was a program involving the community that served to introduce the Adult Literacy Programs to those who were as yet unaware of them. The front porch of the library's Carnegie building became a forum for public readings of favorite stories read by those involved in the literacy effort. The Literacy Coordinator also plans and implements regular "Readers' Theaters" which help to provide tutors and students a safe environment to try out their new literacy skills in front of a non-threatening, sympathetic audience.

Community organizations have also been instrumental in furthering the aims of the Adult Literacy Program at Beaumont Library. Adult learners are eager to speak to civic groups about their experiences in learning to read after years of fear and frustration. They are anxious to inform others that people who are unable to read are not stupid. Businesses, too, help to support the program. Wyle Laboratories, in Beaumont, makes meeting spaces available to learners and their tutors and regularly holds barbecues and other social functions for participants in the program.

Friends of Beaumont Library

The Beaumont Library District has an extremely active Friends of the Library group who have proved to be friends indeed. Children's summer reading programs are supported by funding from the Friends each year. A noted author is invited to speak on the writing process at the Friends' annual meeting in November. Books written by the guest author are available for purchase. Guests have included California historian and State Librarian, Dr. Kevin Starr and authors Mark Salzman, Susan Straight, and Barbara Wood, among others. By far the most prestigious guest, (notwithstanding the importance of Dr. Starr to libraries), was science fiction writer, Ray Bradbury. Hosting Mr. Bradbury became a community effort and a source of great pride. The City of Beaumont donated the use of its civic auditorium and other facilities. Beaumont schools assisted with chairs and high school honor students ushered guests into the auditorium. A formal reception was held at the library for Mr. Bradbury and invited guests. Months of intense planning culminated in the largest attendance at a library program in the 87-year

history of the library. Mr. Bradbury was a gracious guest and happily signed books for fans until well after 9 p.m.

The Friends of Beaumont Library have been generous to the Library District having supplied sets of encyclopedias, an entire set of Chilton's Auto Manuals and other materials that the library cannot afford to provide on its stringent budget. Funds are raised at weekly book sales and other projects.

Humanities Programs

Beaumont Library District has been able to sponsor a number of fine programs funded by the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH). The library has presented several Chautauquas featuring scholars portraying Walt Whitman, Harriet Beecher Stowe, Biddie Mason, and other historical personages. In 1997, the library was fortunate to be able present Poets In Person, a series of workshops stressing the importance of poetry as a literary form. The library has sought the help of the Beaumont-Cherry Valley Recreation and Parks District in presenting these programs. Library meeting spaces are limited and the Parks District, as well as the City of Beaumont, have been generous in supplying space and equipment for programs.

Beaumont Library District has experienced gratifying success in securing grant funding for special programs and services. In 1997, the library was able to augment its collection of African American materials to support its year long emphasis on the contributions of African Americans to our national culture. A series of programs was presented including storytellers or griots, workshops, and film programs.

Story Machine

Children unable to come to the library may nevertheless participate in library reading programs. The library was awarded a grant by the Riverside Press-Enterprise for the purchase and maintenance of a Dial-A-Story machine which brings lively literature to any child who knows the magic telephone number. Fifty-two stories, one per week, are available to be heard over the telephone. Parents have lauded the service, saying that their children often listen several times a day to a story and look forward eagerly to the new story each Friday.

Library Collaboration

The service area of the Beaumont Library District abuts that of another, even smaller library located in Calimesa, California, about 11 miles from the Beaumont Library. This tiny library is housed in a single room of the

Calimesa Senior Center. The Beaumont Library's director works with the non-professional employee in collection development and has initiated a McNaughton Books Rental Service for them. The Beaumont Library handles the paperwork and takes the pre- cataloged books to the Calimesa Library Station on a regular basis. There are no regularly scheduled programs for children beyond an occasional storytime. Youth Services provides information about Beaumont Library's children's programs so those children who use the tiny Calimesa Library Station are aware of them and can participate if they choose.

Blind and Handicapped

Beaumont Library provides access to Braille and talking books for the blind through its contacts with the Braille Institute Library in Los Angeles. Qualified individuals or their representatives fill out a form documenting the handicapped that must be signed by a doctor or other professional which is then sent to the Braille Institute. Users may pick up equipment and books at the library or they may opt to have it delivered directly to their homes.

Conclusion

"The backbone of library service to rural areas is still the public library" (Boyce, 1995). Established delivery services remain of cardinal importance but technology has increased the rural library's abilities to expand its range of services and programs and to widen the world-view of rural library users.

A recent NBC broadcast made it clear that libraries are still of critical importance to a portion of our society who have fallen and seemingly cannot get up. I am referring to homeless individuals who, despite their many misfortunes, remain citizens of this great country and who therefore are entitled to respect for that at least. It is true that the homeless have special needs, many of which cannot be met by any library, let alone the small or rural library with limited resources. The statistics are staggering: more than 4 million individuals have been homeless at some time in their lives. One library is offering some hope to the hopeless in the form of computer technology and the Internet.

High Tech Hope

NBC presented the story of one public library and what its free Internet access has done for some homeless people in Los Angeles. The piece was entitled *High Tech Hope* and it told how some individuals down on their luck, with no real prospects, are getting an opportunity to reclaim their lives via

the free Internet access available in the Los Angeles Public Library, admittedly a large urban library. However, this story could be repeated in hundreds of small libraries that also offer free access to the Internet. Most of the stories go something like this: You are a man or woman who has lost your job, your home, your family. Where do you turn? Some to social services agencies, some to other family members, some to the streets, and some to the library? Yes, the library! It seems that enterprising individuals are making the most of the opportunity to log-on at the library to rebuild their lost lives. Instead of planning a trip, doing some online shopping, or looking up stock quotes, these people have started businesses online! Their offices are the library. Their staff of experts, librarians! What could more exemplify the tradition of service peculiar to the library than to help the user to better his or her life, to offer hope and dignity, to help society at the same time?

So how far does outreach reach? As high and as far as you can stretch your own imagination! (Philip, 1994).

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