

COOPERATION BETWEEN LIBRARIES AND EXTENSION

Tim Lynch
Library Systems Division Coordinator
Nebraska Library Commission
Lincoln, Nebraska

It's a real treat to be invited back to a place where you are supposed to have gathered all this information so I really appreciate being here. As Mike mentioned, I have been around several places. I always find a little bit of inspiration in some of the presidential candidates and I would like to know how many people here know that there is another Republican running for office of the President by the name of Ben Fernandez?

Ben Fernandez was born in a boxcar. It's an inspiring story of going from being born in a boxcar--a converted boxcar--in Kansas City, Kansas and working with his seven brothers and sisters in the fields, the sugar beet and tomato fields of Michigan and Indiana and is now running for President of the United States. I think that is an inspiration--certainly an inspiration for all librarians.

People ask me why I live in Missouri and Kansas--or have lived in the midwest in Kansas and Nebraska. They ask me how can you do that? Well, I'm going to try this out on you because (and I've gotten bad response on this before so "boos" would be okay) I live in Nebraska. I live in Nebraska because it allows me to live a bicoastal lifestyle.

In Nebraska we have a concept of economic development that I found really very interesting. It was on the editorial page of the Lincoln Star Journal and I think this says it all about what we think about economic development in Nebraska, "in order to prosper it has been suggested that Nebraska end its traditional dependence on an agricultural economy." It's rather sad that there's a lack of vision on the part of many people who are involved in economic development and also that there is a lack of vision for librarians dealing with the same topic.

Perhaps this is where we need to start in terms of getting libraries and librarians involved. There is a visioning exercise where we are to envision our library five years down the road: so we have 1993. Guess what the major

thing that people came up with in terms of visioning (no, not cows)? It was good signage, happy staff, friendly people, etc.--hardly visionary. Mostly what we are supposed to be doing now. I think we're trying to get the library involved, thinking of different configurations, seeing how we can work to actually meet the economic development needs of our communities. This is a problem. As was recorded in the last presentation, it is the image of the librarian and the perception of the library that is causing the problem for many of us.

Cooperation and extension--what an interesting idea. I could probably say that's what most librarians think of the cooperative efforts that have been done so far.

I would like to challenge that and say that there are many cooperative efforts. They are on the local level and things are happening. There is an example in Georgia. The Wheeler County Library in Georgia is located down the hall in the same building as the extension. They have what I would call a "just down the hall" type relationship. In fact they borrow materials. The extension borrows the movie projector from the librarian, who happens to be Delle Flower.

They see each other every day. Extension has the VCR and the library has the materials that extension uses for their research. It works. It's a very informal relationship. There has been no programming in common, although the extension materials have been used in library displays. There's really nothing formal about this relationship, it's a "just down the hall" type of relationship.

One of the things that the Central Kansas Library System (which I was affiliated with before I went to Nebraska) did was very interesting--we infiltrated the extension. It's a very simple idea. You realize your responsibilities of being a leader and member of the community and you get on one of the extension boards. It has worked out very well.

Don Reynolds, who is the assistant administrator of the Central Kansas Library System, was elected to the economic development component of the extension. They have a committee and he was elected to that committee. The children's librarian, Marcuta Bankee, has been involved in the human ecology side of the extension for a long time. She has, in fact, been elected to the

council--the actual government of the county extension in Barton County, Kansas. Also, the chairman of the board of the Central Kansas Library System, Pat Hydrick (in Mitchell County) has been appointed or had been elected to the economic development committee of that particular county extension. If you think there's not any cooperative effort because of that--you're wrong. These are strong people. There's going to be something happening in terms of what the library's participation with the cooperative extension.

However, that kind of involvement relies so much on the leadership capabilities of the librarian. And that is sometimes where we are falling down. It goes along with how the librarian sees herself (I will use "herself" because of my past experience in Kansas, out of 70 librarians in our library system we had one male director--the rest were all female, so I will use the "she") in the community is certainly very important in the types of programming we that we (as a system) are trying to get across and to deliver to our system members. The leadership is what was missing. We have some librarians who have a natural leadership ability. They feel very comfortable going out and being members of their community. They understand where they fit into the whole scheme of things. We have other people who don't see themselves that way and have sat back. In fact, their library is the reading room. They do children's story hours and that's where they find themselves.

I think it was crucial--the development of leadership programs that tax --to the Central Kansas Library System. We in turn then provided library service to the rural patron. We did that by providing some support services to the actual libraries. They in turn would extend their service area to cover those people who aren't being served by libraries. That's a very simplified version of actually what happened.

At the same time, we had a problem. Someone had actually lost their farm. We put together meetings throughout the system devised to ask, "What can we do as a library system to help?"

It was determined that there was a real need for information along several different lines. Information needed to be easily accessible, copied, and useful. It couldn't be anything that had a lot of writing in it because people weren't going to take the time to use it. Using the suggestions we got from these

meetings, we developed The Rural Resource Manual. The manual is available from the Central Kansas Library System. I will leave it out for you to look at, if you'd like. It is meant to be used by farmers; by people who are in trouble; and by people who are working with farmers in trouble. The extension people were certainly involved in that. The book is now, I believe, in every extension agency and public library in our service area, which is 17 counties. The manual is not meant to be a "How to Become a Better Farmer." It was meant more to deal with problems of people who were going through transition.

There are several chapters. There's one in mental health--stress. We found stress to be a very large problem in the rural areas. How to deal with stress--legal assistance, financial assistance, credit, the financial forms, legislative information, resources in terms of where to go--from here, and information and referral type services are in here. It's been a really interesting book. This gave us some credibility which was very important in working with the community. The extension people saw this and all of a sudden we had something to offer them.

As part of our response to the rural crisis we put together a collection of books, the Rural Issues Collection, that was developed through the interlibrary loan development project or the grant from the state library. Again, it was not on how to be a better farmer or how to grow better crops. We wanted to help people in transition and to offer some different solutions. We built up the collection in terms of sustainable agriculture just because that information was not being delivered by the land-grant universities in Kansas. Extension was focussing on better wheat. However, we thought that there might be people who were interested in other things such as mental health--stress, changing jobs, the whole career spectrum of information needed if they're going off the farm.

The idea of developing this collection was that the materials would be available for any of our 70 libraries because of the interlibrary loan development grant process. They were actually available throughout the state for loan.

The collection wasn't being used. We developed the collection and it was sitting there not being used! Wonderful! This is great! We were thinking,

"How are we going to get this across?" And one of the things we came up with was we needed to deal with the extension people.

Problem number one: who's going to listen to us? Even though we have credibility, who's going to listen to us? So we try extension. What we determined was we had better luck dealing with the home economists or the human ecology side of extension than we did dealing with the extension agent. We felt that part of the problem, although there's probably no scientific proof for it, was that it is because usually the extension agent is male. That is a truism. The librarian has been traditionally female and mostly we're thought of as being "fluff."

There always has been some sort of relationship between extension and the libraries, like 4-H groups come into the library (that's a traditional one that goes back a long way) and reading clubs (those have been very popular in Nebraska where extension set up reading clubs and through the home economists section of extension). All those types of things were female. The hard data was considered male and the extension's perception of us was that we had nothing to offer them.

We had reached the point of exchanging newsletters with extension. We thought that was a good thing, where they would send us their newsletters and we would send ours to them, until we received a phone call from one of the extension agents saying, "Why are you sending this to me?" Well, we then changed the name on the envelope and the newsletter now goes to the home economists, the human ecologist person and we are cooperating with her. I really do think the traditional male role in rural America and the female role in rural America certainly is an implication of how much cooperation there's actually going to be between extension and the library.

Another thing we started doing in Kansas was to go right to the top. We started with KSU and the extension people at the university, developing relationships with them. We brought in, for instance, Virginia Moxley, who is involved in human ecology and teaches at KSU, to do one of our system assemblies. We would be in constant contact with the extension people there. We brought David Darling in, who is the community economic development specialist for the state of Kansas as a part of extension at KSU, to do an assembly.

When I met David Darling at a meeting the first thing he said to me was, "Do you get all our publications? We want to make sure that all our extension publications are in your library." That's 70 different outlets--that's 70 examples of some sort of cooperation with extension! I found that to be rather exciting. We've cultivated these relationships on that level bypassing some of the obstacles that we might see in the local areas. But we can do that as "systems" people and I believe that individual libraries can also do that. The more the library sees itself as a member of the community it sees other agencies in the community as a resource. Extension is a resource for the library, as well as the library being a resource for the extension. If the librarian can see that or if the library community can understand that then all sorts of cooperative programs will start evolving.

The Central Kansas Library System started meeting with the human ecologists and the home economists sometime throughout the year. We asked in the meetings, "What can we do for you?" And then we told them what we had done in terms of our rural issues collection, the Rural Resource Manual, availability, access to Knowledge Index through the system, and access to Agricola online searching. They said "Well, we're giving a talk." They were giving a program on job-seeking and home-based businesses. We said "Oh, what a neat idea! We have some things that you might like to have." We had this rural issues collection sitting there not being used. We developed subject bibliographies according to the needs of their program. We put together this bibliography on home-based business from our collection.

The assistant director, Don Reynolds, then went to the program. I would recommend this idea--to have the local librarian go and actually give a brief book talk at the end of the program. The librarian has the books with her from the collection so people can see what it is.

Our collection of rural materials I think is interesting. We were very much involved in going to all sorts of conferences and gleaned all sorts of information from different places. I think there's something to be said for this--just by our going out of the library, going to meetings that are not library sponsored, we're finding out all sorts of different information.

The Institute for Public Policy, which is located in Lawrence, Kansas, at KU, sponsors programs on economic development throughout the year. The

first thing they'll ask you is, "As a librarian what are you doing here?" People are shocked that you would somehow be in a meeting which is dealing with policy for the state and economic development. You feel like you have to justify your existence for being there. The answer is immediately on the tip of your tongue, "Because we are community leaders." Soon they begin to think of you as community leaders. You are invited back and you start being involved in actually determining what's happening in your local community or in the state.