

DIRECTOR'S REPORT

December 2003

“The library is not a shrine for the worship of books. It is not a temple where literary incense must be burned or where one’s devotion to the bound book is expressed in ritual. A library, to modify the famous metaphor of Socrates, should be the delivery room for the birth of ideas – a place where history comes to life.”

Norman Cousins

The end of the year is near, though at times it has felt like the end of the world. There is something comforting in operating the fiscal year within the confines of the calendar year, even if year-end purchases are complicated by holidays and vacations. New beginnings that coincide with a new year confer, for me, the possibility of change within renewal.

This has been a particularly challenging year for staff, for the library and for the City – a roller coaster much of the year. So many changes in policies, fee structures, hours and budgets plus a significant increase in the workload have left many feeling perplexed and distressed. There is particular concern about closing at 8:00 p.m. and a desire on the part of staff that I communicate this to you, the Board. I have relayed to them my confidence that you will review this decision and evaluate it before the library reverts to summer hours.

I also think that the combination of reducing hours and increasing fines has fostered patron resentment and staff anxiety. When rates and fees increase there is often a corollary, though temporary, reduction in the use of library services. Curiously, the library has not experienced this.

At some point this Spring I think it would be good to have a staff/board meeting. I understand this has been done occasionally in the past and proved quite helpful in facilitating understanding. In the interim, staff members have made some creative and positive suggestions about telling “Our Story.” The story line is graphically compelling.

Working with Sue Epstein through contract negotiations was both instructive and exhilarating – she is a master at work. The negotiation team thinks we got a most favorable contract on the front end (system procurement) and the back end (maintenance). Whether the new system will serve for another sixteen years may be questionable; but, I have no doubt we will push it to its absolute limit.

As we contemplate the System implementation, we realize that a full review of Bellingham Public Library and Whatcom County Library System policies, practices and procedures relating to circulation must be reviewed. To that end, we intend to set up a review committee. We’ve become acutely aware that decisions made by one library can severely impact the operations of the other. There appears a commitment to addressing these issues.

I believe we are on the road to some resolution between the custodial needs of the library and the service limitations of facilities. At least one more mediated discussion is planned and a needs assessment is in the works.

This week we submitted “We Share a Story” for two awards: the Cavendish Award and the John Cotton Dana Award. It is a program deserving of national recognition; however your personal acclaim does not go unnoticed.

Finally, if you see John Blethen out and about, be sure and give him a hearty thanks. He donated an entire Saturday, December 6th to be exact, to the construction of a platform that has reduced a serious hazard and enabled Outreach to perform its loading of the truck more efficiently and more comfortably.

Have a lovely and joyous holiday season.