

DIRECTOR'S REPORT

February 2003

Public libraries seem to be "institutions of interest" nationwide, and librarians confront dilemmas that would confound Solomon. The USA Patriot Act gives law enforcement sweeping new powers that compel submission under the threat of prosecution for non-compliance. Newly floated proposals would strengthen the draconian measures already in effect. At the state level legislation has been introduced that mandates protections that we cannot guarantee. The issues are extraordinarily complex, not amenable to quick fixes or easy solutions. It is difficult to deny that the perils are not real, but the solutions not only compromise our most dearly cherished beliefs of a free and open society but also fail to protect.

At the heart of the conflict for librarians, is a commitment to privacy and confidentiality embodied in our professional ethics. Indeed, as reported in the February issue of *American Libraries*, over 4000 individual librarians have contributed to an American Library Association legal defense fund to uphold these ideals. We, in the library profession, are navigating uncharted waters.

And for other dark news -- if the State Library sustains the proposed cuts, its status as a federal depository will most probably be repealed. The other unfortunate consequence of the budget cuts is the loss of at least half of the \$3 million dollars in LSTA funds. Staffing will be reduced to fewer than twenty people, quite a reduction from over 120 FTE employed when this initiative began. Doubtless there are reforms and adjustments that could and should be made, but dynamic organisms require more than a shell.

On a more positive note, copies of the Site Evaluation Report are being prepared for public release. The distribution list includes City Council, the Mayor's Office, reference copies for BPL and Fairhaven, Whatcom County Library System, the Bellingham Herald, and of course corrected copies for the Board and committee members. They will be available at the next Board meeting.

Office renovations are 99% complete, minus a few pieces of hardware. The new staff photocopier awaits installation. The fiasco with the public photocopiers has been resolved, though we still await delivery. The electronic counters are counting and the numbers are staggering. (We have grossly underestimated the number of people who use the library daily.) The book returns pile higher and deeper; we have pictures to prove it. And, altogether you could infer that we are very busy.

The long-range picture also develops. The system RFP is nearly ready for release. The annual report is well underway, as is the millennial report. I am working on a calendar for a capital campaign. It's time to gear up for the future. At the very latest we will plan for a bond issue in the Spring of 2004. You, too, have some deliberative decisions to make.

The budget also presents interesting and complicated issues. In his State of the City address, Mayor Mark enumerated the reasons we must find new, more effective ways to deliver services. Obviously we have reached the nexus between government and initiatives. The meeting is not of the mind and the heart but of available revenues and

critical operations. Library use continues to increase; how do we stretch our resources to meet the demand? Your thoughts, ideas and suggestions are welcome.