

DIRECTOR'S REPORT

July 2003

“In all these years, I have never begrudged an overdue fine, a lost book fee or even a tax increase to the library. How could I possibly put a price on the value of the one place I know I can always count on to take me away from the tedium of today and bring me back refreshed and relaxed? For only pennies, I have tickets to faraway places, fame and fortune, love and laughter. Give me a library card, and I can cope with just about anything....”

Gloria Trotter, *Tecumseh Countywide News*, OK

Budgets are like quicksilver, breaking into beaded patterns and random assimilations, never transparent, tethered by gossamer filaments stronger than crystal bonds. Some of the fiscal realities we confront are truly structural and these are far more troubling than the politically necessitated retrenchments.

The cost of books and other library materials, for instance, continues to rise at rates disproportionate to inflation without any objective or justifiable reason for so doing. I suspect, though I cannot prove, some measure of BPL's increased circulation relates to diminishing personal purchasing power. The burden for the library is ever-greater demand for contracting resources. 'Tis an exquisitely painful balancing act.

It is a long lamented this dilemma. At one time the Board set a goal of gradually increasing the “book” budget to 18% of the overall budget. While this seems appealing at first glance, there are some fundamental flaws to this approach. A somewhat different angle might involve establishing an annual rate of collection growth or perhaps a rate of growth based on population. But the acquisition growth model begs the underlying question -- “How do we ensure a stable funding base, insensitive to a volatile economy?” I think “brokers” call them “market neutral” funds or even hedge funds and I wonder if we might come up with some library equivalent. Just a thought...

Of course the CIPA (Child Internet Protection Act) ruling was terribly disappointing. And, as a very dear friend pointed out, The Court “never” makes decisions predicated on a cost analysis. Cost, however much a real issue, is not the overarching concern – the disregard of fundamental liberties, the inexplicable mandate that the filter be “electronic,” the utter disregard of the concept of “local control” and the inane supposition that “technology” will win out is utterly unintelligible. Heaven forbid that the unintended consequences be debated. I guess my, heretofore, unarticulated question is “Who was clerking?” ...even superficially, regardless of political persuasion, most of the opinions were uninformed.

I very much hope that you are all able to attend the joint board meeting being hosted by WCLS. Joan and I have held interesting discussions over the last few months about where our libraries are going independently and where else we might venture cooperatively. Though no immediate decisions are expected or warranted at this time, the dialog may open many possibilities for the future.