

DIRECTOR'S REPORT

August 2003

“The public library has been historically a vital instrument of democracy and opportunity in the United States.... Our history has been greatly shaped by people who read their way to opportunity and achievements in public libraries.” Arthur Schlesinger

Let's hope it remains a vital instrument of democracy. ...although to paraphrase the sage, cutting library budgets is a far more effective tool of censorship than burning books.

This has been a month both exciting and perplexing. Perplexing because the budget seems to be a moving target; may it soon rest in peace. Though we did meet mandated goals, more may be required. Perhaps salient details will be known by the Board Meeting. 'Tis puzzling.

Exciting because of the commitment of dedicated staff and volunteers make real achievements appear routine. ...and the beat goes on. Circ is up – and even though that begins to sound like a broken record, one wonders what the capacity is? I fear that the steep budget cuts will begin to have their toll; and, that of course, is realized over time, usually a couple of years, evidenced by declining circulation and traffic.

The Bellingham Festival of Music brought its share of new, though temporary, users. The musicians quickly discovered the library had free Internet access and appeared in ever increasing numbers to check email and stay in touch with home. They come from near and far – from Seattle to New York and as far away as Berlin. Good will abounds. Several commented on the business of our library.

Kids did “Read Up a Storm” – and celebrated with Mayor Mark, Reader Raccoon, and an enthusiastic staff led by Scott. The Friends hosted a special “book give-away and sale” to ensure that the children are ushered into this Bellingham tradition early. We build not only future library users and supporters but also a supply of donors. I think I'll talk to Tom about “futures.”

We've just finished two intense days of demos from one of two qualifying vendors – DYNIX. WCLS hosted the event. Sessions like these require permanent set up and we simply don't have the availability.

The DYNIX Horizon system is powerful and dynamic (I believe the “new” terminology is “robust.”) The dialog was open, free ranging and quite stimulating. While there are many desirable improvements, there are definitely more that can be made and some are on the drawing board. The system architecture is open, permitting customized modifications that are user initiated as well as the ability to add third party software. In other words, if you can design it, find it or buy it, you can install it without queuing up while the vendor determines whether the application merits development.

For example, there is significant interest in developing audit compliant cash management systems not only statewide but nationwide. The team made astute and responsive observations; they do have a vested interest. If DYNIX is selected as our vendor, we will facilitate a user group meeting with their development team and representatives from the state auditor's office.

Our next set of demonstrations is toward the end of the month with GIS Information Systems. They are emerging as a strong competitor and hope to gain a foothold in DYNIX country. We look forward to seeing what they have to offer. There are inherent challenges in setting up an integrated system that works across the different policies and practices that co-mingle in consortium environments – a reality that applies to both vendors and participating libraries.

For your consideration at our Board meeting is a discussion we must have on an assessment of our current building. The local architectural team has proposed a fee for this study. Our questions need to focus on whether to conduct the study, when to conduct the study if so decided and who should conduct the study. While doubtless there are elements common to such studies, including topological and engineering reports, there are also elements unique to library redesign, renovation and expansion that suggest the need for expertise with library construction. I look forward to our meeting.