

DIRECTOR'S REPORT

September 2003

“Now, when I read constantly about the way in which library funds are being cut and cut, I can only think that the door is closing and that American society has found one more way to destroy itself.” Isaac Asimov, 1994

Perhaps memory is short or my research skills have abated, but the cuts that libraries are suffering today appear to be much deeper both in real dollars and percentages than they were in 94. Add to that reality the disproportionate increase in the cost of books (a resemblance more akin to rising health care costs than the national CPI) and unfunded mandates such as electronic filtering and it is easy to see that the library dollar has taken an unprecedented beating.

Fairhaven folks are beginning to use self-checkout. Truly a milestone that augurs well for future use at the main library. Though we installed the unit in late spring, we were somewhat apprehensive about patron response, particularly at Fairhaven. Why? The population of library users is more accustomed to the intimate environment of Fairhaven as well as the more customized service; we feared rejection out of hand. Experience suggests that approximately six months are required for a new technology to catch on; fortunately Fairhaven is no exception. Not unexpectedly, kids were the first and most enthusiastic users of self-check.

Speaking of systems, the DYNIX HORIZON and GIS POLARIS demonstrations went well. But to back up a bit – as you will recall, the Bellingham Whatcom County library consortium issued an RFP for an Integrated Library System (ILS) earlier in the year. We received five responses and evaluated them on a number of “first cut” factors: responsiveness to the required elements stated in the RFP, software cost, data conversion cost, functionality and operating system requirements. Two vendors were eliminated immediately on the basis of two or more of these factors. Two vendors were qualified; a third appeared competitive on all factors but cost, a defining consideration but one that may bear revisiting. We are well into the next phase – exhaustive comparison and evaluation of both systems. More to come.

Disaster Planning, Response and Recovery, a free workshop sponsored by OCLC and the State Library, provided a comprehensive overview (6.5 hours) of risk assessment, documentation and systematic response approaches. The presenter went far beyond “What to do when the water rises” detailing not only the many facets of preparedness but also the many forms disasters may take. Quantification guidelines were most helpful as were practical suggestions for safeguarding response crews. The onsite exercise permitted the opportunity to practice pre-disaster observations – perhaps predictive of potential problems. The information is pertinent to our current operations and has critical implications for the design of our future library. CIPA (Child Internet Protection Act) workshops are scheduled statewide. Several staff members will attend; I encourage as many board members as possible to attend also. Interpretations of the Act are still quite muddled as are the implications for federal funding from any source. That is my concern, not only for the anticipated library campaign, but also for future projects and programs.

An invitation from Joyce D. Hammond, Ph.D., Anthropology Department at Western Washington University, to participate in a Participatory Action Research project is intriguing. Preliminary discussions with one of her Teaching Assistants promise possible fits for two projects on my tentative list of things to do: 1) A New Library – Imagine the Future; 2) Outreach: An Assessment.

By now you have received your PLA (Public Library Association) preliminary program. I urge you to consider attending the Friday sessions, February 27, on building design beginning at 10:30 a.m. and continuing until 5:30 p.m. Libris DESIGN is a particularly exciting software application, one that might inform our efforts as well as those of any architect we might select. Alas, my file of “don’ts” is far larger than my file of “do’s”; it’s hard to beat the rectangular box.

And, a reminder – Planning Your Successful Library Election Campaign, 10 – 5, October 1st, Yakima.

The agenda is long; shall I bring pillows? ...coffee? ...perhaps a bell?