

DIRECTOR'S REPORT

September 2009

Director's Report and Highlights September 15, 2009

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Reading season?

It's raining hard outside, looking very much like Fall. Time for the "reading season", although I think every season in Bellingham is the reading season! Our usage certainly bears this out.

Here's an intriguing article, one you might agree with: "The Lost Art of Reading" by David L. Ulin, LA Times (8-9-09). He writes: "The relentless cacophony that is life in the 21st century can make settling in with a book difficult even for lifelong readers and those who are paid to do it."

He goes on, "...after spending hours reading e-mails and fielding phone calls in the office, tracking stories across countless websites, I find it difficult to quiet down. I pick up a book and read a paragraph; then my mind wanders and I check my e-mail, drift onto the Internet, pace the house before returning to the page...What I'm struggling with is the encroachment of the buzz..." and he talks about "the anxiety of the age."

Ulin asks, "How do we pause when we must know everything instantly? How do we ruminate when we are constantly expected to respond? How do we immerse in something (an idea, an emotion, a decision) when we are no longer willing to give ourselves the space to reflect?"

Finding time and space

We have been so busy at the library that fourteen staff members spent four hours last Sunday catching up with checking in, shelving, pulling and processing holds. We are considering scheduling this kind of marathon once a month just to stay on top of the piles of books. Nothing fancy, just the basics of keeping the materials moving and available for the public! Today, Iris reports that we have a record 3,168 holds on our shelves waiting to be picked up in the next day or two – and more will be shelved tomorrow, and the next day, and...

What's the connection? When we are so busy in our work, it is difficult to find time to reflect or take the necessary time to consider all the options available to us. Yet we must. At each staff meeting our primary topic these days is quite simply how to get the work done as use continues its upward spiral with a decrease in our staffing level.

Staff members are brainstorming ideas to cope with this phenomenon. We will share these with you as they take shape. The ideas will be a combination of changes in the way we provide service and elimination of some services.

With \$121,000 cut in the spring, and another \$350,000 cut effective on October 1, the Library has had to eliminate eight staff positions. This is a hard time for staff, those leaving and those remaining. Unfortunately, our reduction in public service hours is very visible evidence of our staff cutback.

You also may begin to see changes in our materials collection, either having to wait longer for a title, or not finding what you want in our collection. Our materials budget has been cut by 20%. The conundrum is that even though we have fewer staff, and fewer hours open, we know that our business will not diminish. Not in these times. Not in this community.

We are in the company of many libraries across the nation. Some recent headlines: *Cuyahoga County Library makes cuts; Brooklyn Layoffs Made News; Omaha PL, Squeezed, Lays Off 25% of FTE; Responding to Cuts, Ohio PLs Drop Staff, Hours; PA Budget at Impasse - Libraries Threatened; In BC, Provincial Support for Libraries Cut 22%*. Should we feel heartened that we are not alone? At the least, we can learn from one another.

We love that the library is busy, and that this community continues to read, to listen/view – using library materials. We like that you are finding the time to read and the space to reflect that reading provides. Keep it up. We will do our best to keep up with you!