

Grand Jury Likes Reopening Of ^{Branch} Libraries

The announced plans to re-open the Ben Lomond, Soquel and LaSelva Beach branch li-

braries and to restore the Bookmobile to service have been termed "heartening" by the foreman of the county grand jury.

But, Foreman Jay Bartle has told the Library Board and Librarian Charles Atkins that the grand jury, in its role as ombudsman, is concerned about various aspects of library management and operation. And Bartle has expressed the hope that when these concerns are made public citizens of the county will communicate their reactions to library officials and to their elected representatives.

Some of the library problems revealed by the branch closures and management questions prompted Bartle to write the Library Board a letter Dec. 5.

Atkins said he never received a letter from the grand jury and has not been contacted by grand jury members on the subject of library operations and management.

Atkins told The Sentinel: "The first knowledge I received regarding a communication from the grand jury on library matters came from The Sen-

tinel article Monday.

"No one ever discussed with me the reasons for the recommendation that some branches and the Bookmobile be closed at the start of this fiscal year because of a \$251,000 cut in the library budget.

"If any member of the grand jury had discussed this with me I could have justified the closures to them. But I was never consulted."

Library Board Chairman Gerald Towner, to whom Bartle addressed the letter, said he had not received a previous letter either, and commented: "I don't think it was very nice for them to handle it this way."

Bartle's letter stated: "We urge that the Library Board, the City Council and the Board of Supervisors study and act upon these recommendations immediately."

Recommendations and commentary on the primary concerns of the grand jury were expressed by Bartle as follows:

1. "The grand jury is greatly concerned about the abrupt and ill-timed decision of the Library Board and Chief Librarian Charles Atkins to close several branches and the Bookmobile. The ensuing outcry of citizens whose services had been cut, indicates a serious lack of rapport between the Library Board and the community it is intended to serve..."

2. "The grand jury recommends that the Library Board create citizen advisory committees at each branch and that both the board and the library administration establish ongoing communication with these committees. The energy used to spearhead action to reopen the branches is a valuable resource and can be appropriately channeled to study and advise on branch priorities.

3. "The grand jury recommends the increased use of

media by the Library Board and the administration to inform all citizens of library policy and services and to elicit broad citizen input with regard to any proposed changes. This recommendation is based not only on the need to prevent future hard feelings and misunderstandings but also to achieve a strong system that serves the needs of all the citizens.

4. "Although the grand jury respects the circulation figures that support the need for a high level of service at the central library, we also believe that the sense of community of the smaller branches is equally valuable and need not be sacrificed. It is neither necessary nor advisable to choose between a good central library and local branches that provide learning, social and cultural centers for many citizens, including many seniors and preschoolers. This is particularly true of the Bookmobile..."

5. "Budget cuts notwithstanding, the deterioration of the present system can be avoided. The grand jury urges the judicious and creative use of alternative resources. Alternative resources include the use of volunteers in a variety of capacities such as assisting staff, researching individual branch needs and fundraising and book donations.

6. "Finally, the grand jury strongly recommends that the Library Board, the City Council and the Board of Supervisors proceed without delay to define the agency to whom the chief librarian is ultimately responsible, to determine the powers and responsibilities of that agency and to establish a statement of policy acceptable to all concerned."

Bartle saluted the Library Board for its recent appointment of a committee to redraft its bylaws.

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