

Libraries 1980-1989

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SLV libraries buck county trend of declining circulation

By Robin Hutchings

Although patronage of small branch libraries throughout the county decreased last year, there are several bright spots in the picture: the Ben Lomond, Felton and Boulder Creek libraries, for instance.

Among county branch libraries, the Felton and Boulder Creek branches registered the largest increases in books checked out, according to a recent report by the county auditor-controller for the fiscal year ending last June.

Ben Lomond Community Library, which was dropped from the city/county system two years ago and is now run by volunteers, has also shown an increase in the number of books checked out.

In general, however, branch libraries in the county continued for the fifth straight year to drop in their share of books checked out, according to the audit, while the costs per book have climbed. It now costs \$1.50 per book checked out to run the library, according to the audit.

The Scotts Valley library had a 19.2 percent decrease in circulation; the La Selva Beach branch, run by volunteers but using city/county books, dropped 22.1 percent; and the Freedom library, which recently moved from a shopping center location to a school, showed a circulation drop of 65.8 percent, the report maintained.

The Capitola branch library closed altogether late last year, and the Aptos branch library showed only a 1 percent increase in circulation for the past fiscal year, according to the audit.

The tiny Alba library, located in the Alba Schoolhouse in Ben Lomond dipped in circulation by 14.7 percent. That library, open two hours a week, is the approximate size of a kitchen. It is run by Margaret Walters, a 37-year resident of Alba Road who has operated the library for the past dozen years. She picks up the books at the main library in Santa Cruz for the 50 or so regular patrons of the library and is paid \$7 a month by the Alba Road Recreational district board.

Except for the Alba library, however, libraries in the Valley bucked the trend of lower circulation among branch libraries.

Felton picked up 4 percent in circulation for a total of 41,654 books checked out during the fiscal year.

The Boulder Creek library had almost 7 percent more books checked out during the past fiscal year for a total of 27,341 books

circulated during the year, according to the report.

Ben Lomond Community Library has also continued to increase patronage, according to volunteer librarian Faye Ellis. That library was taken over by volunteers two years ago when the city/county library board determined it was not paying its way. The Soquel library also dropped out of the system at about the same time and has since been run by volunteers.

According to Ellis, the circulation has steadily climbed. The library, until the Jan. 4 storm, was open six days a week. It is now on a temporary schedule, open only in the afternoons during the week and on Saturdays from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.

The year following the takeover, circulation jumped more than 120 percent, Ellis said. This past fiscal year showed another increase of about 80 percent, she noted.

"Circulation was at rock bottom when we took over," said Ellis. After volunteers expanded the library's hours, the number of books being checked out "has continued to zoom," she said.

Among city libraries, the central library in Santa Cruz showed a .7 percent dip in circulation, while the Branciforte library increased almost 1 percent.

Garfield Park library had the largest increase of all libraries in the city/county system with a 47.9 percent boost in books circulated, according to the audit.

Another "branch" that didn't fare as well this past fiscal year was the bookmobile. That mobile library showed a 36.4 percent decrease in the number of books circulated.

According to Jim Lee, chair of the library board and a San Lorenzo Valley-Scotts Valley realtor, the figures on the bookmobile may be deceiving.

The bookmobile, said Lee, has been plagued with mechanical problems and now needs a new engine. Lee said he doubts the bookmobile was on the road as many days during the 1980-81 fiscal year in comparison to the previous year.

According to the city/county library system agreement, the costs are shared by the City of Santa Cruz and the county in the same ratio as the percentage of books circulated. That means this year the county will pay less than it did last year for the total \$1.334 million cost of the library operation.