

# Surveys explore library potential

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Most people think of public libraries as fixtures that have always been around and will continue to exist forever, says Anne Turner, director of Santa Cruz City-County Libraries. Further, Turner said the average citizen, whether a library user or not, gives little thought to how book collections are selected and who determines what services will be available.

Now, local residents have the opportunity to develop and offer their opinion on libraries. Three major mail, telephone and user surveys are underway to provide library officials with information they will need to plan for the best services possible in the next five years.

"People always assume libraries are going to be there," said Turner. "But they don't think about the potential of a library."

Some 72,000 one-page questionnaires are being mailed to county residents. Mary Ann Kaplan, president of the library board, said a 20 percent response would be "wonderful."

"Our motive is to get more people to use the library through finding out what they need," said Kaplan.

In addition to the mail survey, a six-page questionnaire will be available in the central and branch libraries Nov. 13 to 17. Library officials are hoping for 1,000 responses. Users will be asked how convenient it is to use the library, what the single, most important use they have for the library, what items they checked out, if they use the card catalog, what changes they would like to see made in the library system and whether they would like to know more about how to use the library. There are spaces for written comments and suggestions.

Telephone surveys will be conducted the same week. People will be asked about 40 questions, said Gary Hada, who is working on the survey. It will take about 15 minutes to answer the survey. Volunteer callers are still needed, he said.

"Hopefully, we will reach the non-users with the telephone survey," said Kaplan. "We'll find out why they don't use the library and what we can do so they will use it."

The questions were developed using the American Library Association suggestions.



Ann Turner . . . after ideas

A committee of city and county representatives have been working with Turner and her staff since May to develop the questionnaires.

"I'm excited," Turner said. "We're mailing to 72,000 households, we'll have neighborhood coffees to get more ideas — it's fun."

Turner, who has been library director for the past year, said the time was ideal to begin a survey. She said industry conducts surveys all the time, but libraries are just starting to take advantage of information on this scale.

"Since 1978, we've been in a responsive mode to financial crisis," she said, referring to Prop. 13 cutbacks, including the closure of five county libraries. "It's time to take a deep breath and figure out what we want for 1990, what we want for the future. We're looking for hard data."

In addition to that data, there are plenty of opportunities for survey respondents to ask for their heart's desire, she said.

"I'm hoping people will ask for the impossible," she said. "I want them to let their imagination run loose."

"I also want to know how important free libraries are to people. I want to know that."