

Libraries- 1980-1989

# County's library system faces financial emergency

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The director of the Santa Cruz city and county library system said today that unless the system gets more money, it will have to make some deep and painful cuts in service.

"The cuts will be substantial in staffing and in hours of service," director Anne Turner said during the Aptos Chamber of Commerce monthly breakfast meeting. The library has already cut its book-buying budget by 45 percent, she said.

Turner explained that the library's funding plan was related to the infamous County Service Area 38, which sought to impose fees for increased sheriff's patrols in the county. The fees were successfully opposed and repealed in December.

"The library had the very bad luck to be connected with that," she said.

The library gets two-thirds of its funding from the county and

one-third from the city of Santa Cruz. Of its \$2.8 million budget this year, the county's share should have been about \$1.86 million, but the county could provide only \$1.2 million, Turner said. The city has an easier time providing funding because cities can impose fees and taxes more easily than counties can, she said.

When the CSA for library

fine, for instance, to charge a corporation that could afford it for some services, "but do we charge a single mother with five children for story hour?"

Another suggestion was to seek out private funding.

"It's important to understand that virtually every non-profit group and service that has been hit by cuts is now out beating the bushes for private contribu-

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services was first proposed, the library expected a one-year budget crunch until the fees started coming in, and cut back the book budget for a year to accommodate it. But since taxpayers seem unwilling to be taxed further the library must now look at long-term solutions, and that means cutting staffing and hours of service.

She said the library system had already closed all the branches it reasonably could in 1978, when Prop. 13 first devastated county budgets.

"Just to maintain level services," Turner said, "our costs go up five percent every year. What we're talking about is a cut every year unless we can have a five percent increase. The county sources of revenue that they can use to support the library are not growing fast enough to even support level funding."

She said cuts since 1978 have already been big. The La Selva Beach branch is staffed entirely by volunteers now, for example, and the Freedom branch is open only 10½ hours a week.

A man in the audience suggested charging fees for some of the library's services, such as calls to the reference desk.

"Free public libraries are mandated by state law," Turner replied. "Public libraries need to be free, because you don't know where to charge."

She explained that it would be

tions," Turner said. "We are competing with virtually everybody. Private money ought to be used to provide superior public library service. Tax money should be used to provide adequate library service."

Even now, she said, library service in Santa Cruz County is not adequate. Adequate service would begin with three books per person; currently, there are 1.6 books per person, and that number is going down "because we're not buying books," she said. Branches are also needed in Live Oak and Capitola, where there are a total of 5,500 registered borrowers who generally use the Aptos or central branches.

"There are no adequate services in the southern part of the county," she added. The city of Watsonville runs its own library system apart from the city and county system.

Turner said that free public libraries were "a basic cornerstone of the working of our democracy," making information available to everyone, not just to those with the means to go into a book store and buy it.

"If we don't have public libraries," she said, "we're in big trouble. I think we're in big trouble right now because our public library system is going to go down and down unless we get the proper funding."

