

Libraries 1980

Volunteers make La Selva Beach library unique

By KEITH MURAOKA

Sentinel Staff Writer

LA SELVA BEACH — It looks just like any other small community library. But appearances can be deceiving. Just ask Ann Marie Martinez, Dot Allen, Harriet French, Beverly Bontadelli, Bertha Johnston — and the volunteer list goes on.

They are just some of the members of the La Selva Beach Library Guild, a volunteer organization that is responsible for staffing the one-room library. Among them, they put in between 200 and 300 volunteer hours a month. They've done so ever since the Santa Cruz City-County Library System closed the branch in 1978 because of budget cutbacks.

However, the branch was soon reopened, having been accorded a special status by the Library Board. As Martinez, the current Guild president says, "They couldn't refuse the kind of offer we made — work for free."

And that's precisely what they've done over the last five years. The uncommon relationship — the city-county library system providing books and supplies, with volunteers doing the staffing and maintaining the building — is unique in the county.

It was made possible because the system had no paid-workers at the

La Selva Beach branch at the time cutbacks came. The city of Santa Cruz, which manages the library system, does not permit volunteers to replace professional workers.

Allen, who happens to be a librarian who works part-time mostly at the Branciforte branch, concedes, "I think they really expected the volunteers to fall flat on their faces."

No one, not even the volunteers themselves, imagined they would still be running the library today. But, the volunteer effort has resulted in increased circulation, as well as increased hours.

According to Bertha Johnston, circulation runs between 600 and 800 books a month. The library is open 19 hours a week, including 7 to 9 p.m. each Monday and Wednesday. Special storybook hours are even held every Wednesday morning.

To say the least, the continued operation of the branch has been good for both sides. Of course, it has also helped the most important people — the public.

"The library is a part of life," says Beverly Bontadelli, treasurer of the library guild. "It's truly an important part of a small community like this."

Fellow volunteer Harriet French, who worked 14 years as librarian in La Selva Beach, adds, "We're work-



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ing on the third generation of library patrons. People who used to come in when they were kids are now bringing in their kids."

French was instrumental in helping to train the volunteers. A condition of the Library Board involved her supervising them.

"They all became good librarians," she adds, laughing, "even

if they didn't know the difference between fiction and non-fiction."

Among the volunteers' biggest accomplishments was completed recently. They raised \$1,800 for new carpeting.

"We call it our cookie carpet," says Bontadelli. "I don't know how many cookie sales it took to raise the money."

She notes that many book sales were also held. "Sometimes people were buying back their own books," she says. Adds Martinez, "You would think they'd get sick of cookies, jams and jellies, but they did it for the library."

Other volunteers cited for help by Martinez included Robert Ginsberg, Rosemary Dempsey, Harlaine

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Volunteer
Dot Allen

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La Selva Beach Library Guild volunteer members Martita Randall, Ann Marie Martinez and Beverly Bontadelli, left to right.

Roome, Linnea Bennett, Martita Randall, Lynn McCarthy and Gladys McCullough.

Allen, who has now taken over supervision of the volunteers, says she isn't surprised locals pulled it off. "That's the kind of community La Selva Beach is," she says. "They care about keeping things going for their neighbors."