

Serious book lover finds his niche in Santa Cruz

By JENNIFER KOSS
STAFF WRITER

Bill Hinchliff is obsessed with books.

That fact is obvious the moment a visitor steps into Hinchliff's Santa Cruz apart-

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Bibliophile Bill Hinchliff

ment. There are books everywhere — in the living room, study, bedroom, kitchen. Books on bookshelves, cupboards, closets; piled in corners and stacked on tables.

He's got between 2,000 and 2,500 volumes crammed into his apartment, Hinchliff figures, and he doesn't mind a bit; like Jell-O, there's always room for more.

"It borders on mania," he said contentedly of his life-long love. "In fact, it is a mania. It grows every year."

Divorced from his first wife and separated from his second, Hinchliff lives a quiet, hobbit-like existence in his world of books. Sipping tea at his kitchen table on a recent sunny afternoon, the bearded and graying 68-year-old scholar described his entry into his world of books.

A Harvard graduate, Hinchliff was 42 and working as an oil industry representative in local affairs, verging on a mid-life crisis, when an "absolutely abominable" southern California library stoked his smoldering love for books. Soon he was busy helping organize an association similar to the local Friends of the Library group. Members raised money to stock the library above its annual allocation and introduced some new ideas.

One of those new ideas was paperbacks. Their introduction into that little library was one of the first entries for paperback books into library circulation, Hinchliff said. Today they're nearly everywhere, and he said he prefers paperbacks himself. They may not last as long as hardbacks, but they can be shoved in a pocket and read on the run.

The upshot of that experience was a change of career for Hinchliff. It was also the beginning of the end of his first marriage.

"My first wife said it completely possessed me 24 hours a day," he said of his library work.

Despite the lure the library held for Hinchliff, it wasn't until the chief librarian at UCLA suggested that he sounded like a librarian that he dumped his oil-industry career and headed back to school.

A year later, he was clutching a new degree and searching for a job. His search brought him through Santa Cruz, where he was

tion. "I think it's on the cutting edge of library evolution," he said.

Hinchliff brings much of the information he gathers to board meetings of the Santa Cruz City/County Public Library System. The Santa Cruz library, he said, "has the potential to be the best in the state, and it has the potential to be one of the best in the nation."

However, since some sections of the county are poorly served, "When you average it out, it's mediocre," he said.

Still, Hinchliff's interest in libraries is unflagging. He's become a fixture at the meetings and is often the only

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unable to find a job, but had an experience he never forgot.

"I had never seen such a crowded library," Hinchliff said. "I said to myself, 'This community reads.'

"And I said to myself, 'I'll be back.'"

There followed 10 years of library directorships and management positions from Milwaukee to Wash., D.C. Then in 1974, Hinchliff returned to Santa Cruz. Like so many others, he never left again.

Neither did he find a job in Santa Cruz. So he made his own.

He calls himself the "Community Bibliographer." Over the past 10 years he's written 28 extensive bibliographies and numerous smaller ones on a variety of topics.

The thought behind Hinchliff's work is that a bibliography can put information at the fingertips of anyone needing to make a decision on any topic, and the world would be a better place if decision-makers were better informed. A bibliography can weed out reams of irrelevant informa-

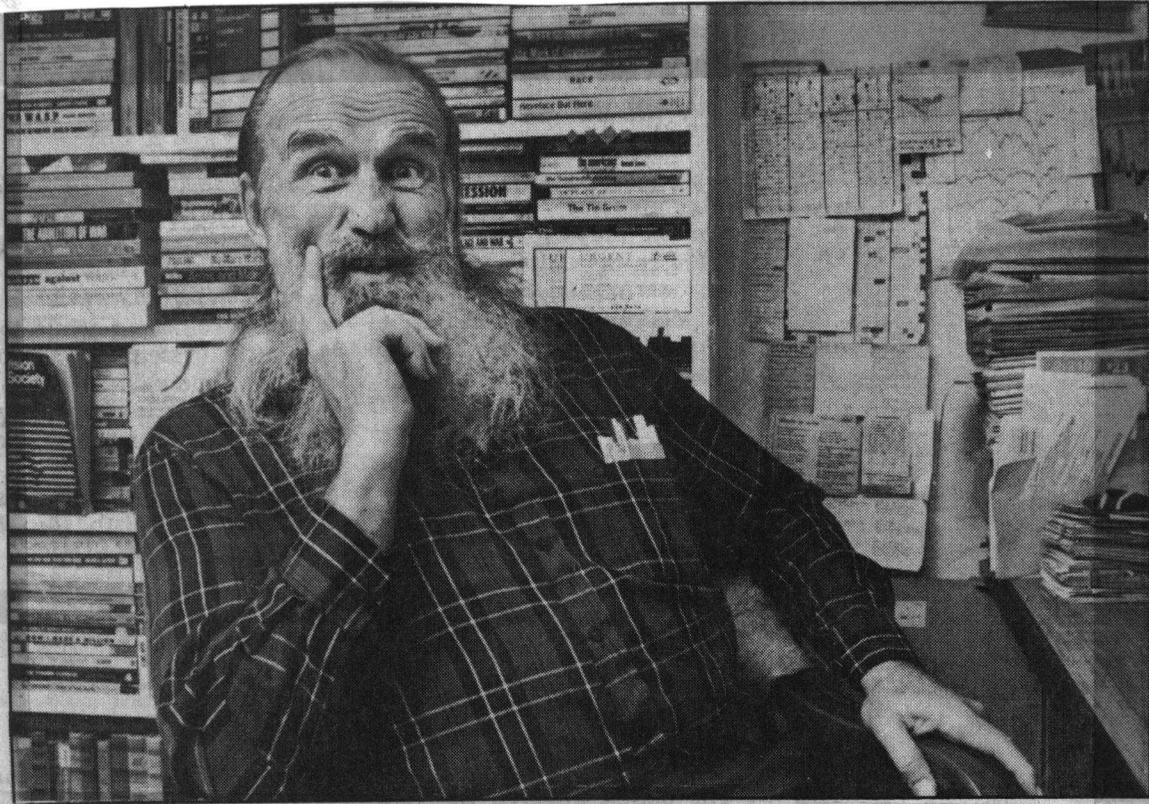
member of the public present other than the press. He's probably the library's biggest advocate.

He envisions all the libraries in the world being linked up someday through computers. In his dream, community bibliographers in cities all over the globe are busy sorting and sifting information, sending it out in bibliography form to anyone with a need for knowledge.

Many of Hinchliff's bibliographies have been sent, often unsolicited, to people he's figured they could help. Of late he's been funneling his energy into building a better library at the Ark, an alternative school near Natural Bridges, but he's still a bibliographer at heart.

Asked if he'll ever retire, Hinchliff said he never uses that word. He did spend a moment, though, contemplating the fulfillment of his dream.

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Diane Varni

Book-lover Bill Hinchliff calls himself the "Community Bibliographer."