



Aptos Library branch manager Heidi Smith helps Morgan Townley, 5, check out a video.

Kurt Ellison

Aptos Library

Libraries 1970-1999

Familiar community landmark nears 20th anniversary

By DAVID RATNER
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APTOS AREA residents may soon be shaking their heads in wonder at "how time flies" when a familiar Aptos landmark turns 20 years old this spring.

The Aptos branch of the public library system — still remembered as a new building by many who watched it go up — opened its doors two decades ago, on June 30, 1975, about six months after construction began.

"A lot of folks still view the Aptos Library as a new facility, the new library in the county," said branch manager Heidi Smith. "That's because nothing really got built after this building, except for the Boulder Creek branch (at the opposite end on the county)."

With more than 50,000 books, the Aptos branch still serves as a center for the recreational reading of people living in the neighborhood. However, today, about half of its clientele actually lives outside Aptos, and — like the East Santa Cruz Branciforte Library — the branch is designated by librarians as a "regional" rather than a "neighborhood" library.

"About 1978 or '79 we became practically overnight a regional library, serving the entire Mid-county area — Aptos, Soquel, Capitola, and to a certain extent, parts of Live Oak," said Smith.

Widespread use of the Aptos branch began when other libraries closed, including the Capitola, Seventh Avenue, and — for a short time — La Selva Beach and Freedom branches.

Smith estimates that half of the branch's users are from Aptos, 40 percent from Capitola and Soquel and the remainder from elsewhere.

Approximately 1,000 books are checked in and another 1,000 are checked out daily. But, Smith said, it is because the

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— Heidi Smith, Aptos branch manager

Aptos branch offers a number of library services that are less easily measured than book circulation that it earns the title "regional."

"We have a little bit more than what a neighborhood library would have to offer. We have more reference materials, we have study hall facilities, we have a meeting room available to the public," she said.

During the last 20 years, Smith said, the concept of what a library is has been evolving. It was formerly considered "a collection of books to be borrowed," but today she would define it as "a building that houses information and sparks interest and curiosity."

This shift in emphasis from actual books to information, was accelerated "with the mass marketing of personal computers in the last decade," Smith said.

Nevertheless, for book lovers, Smith said, the Aptos branch "offers a full smorgasbord of materials. We've got everything from the 'lust in the dust' love story romances to good biographies. Really popular now is fantasy and science fiction among young adults — along with good old Stephen King horror stories. We have plenty of that."

"We have classics, both in the adult and the children's col-

lections; we have a very decent non-fiction collection. In some areas, our books are old because it's okay for them to be old — in things like local history. In other areas, like business, finance and career counseling, our books are not any older than five years. So I can assure the public in good conscience that they are not going to be getting misinformation in those areas."

Besides the book collection, Aptos subscribes to between 60 and 70 magazines. "We tend to have popular, broad-based periodicals — news magazines, computer magazines, ladies' magazines. Anything from Ladies Home Journal to Time Magazine, from Byte to California Business," Smith said.

Also, she said, the branch has a "very decent pamphlet file, thanks to the efforts of our volunteers, who send away for information on everything from travel to California missions, to how to build a rabbit hutch."

Smith said that the staff of five librarians is nearly the same size today as 20 years ago, but the number of people using the branch has tripled. This means, that "the library cannot meet the demands people make on it, or get the same personal attention as formerly."

"One of the things that bothers me a lot is that there are a fair amount of people who walk into this library needing information, and because there is no staff available to help them, turn around and leave. And this is something that bothers librarians and certainly should bother the public. Unfortunately, our manpower is so stretched right now that we can't give the one on one that we used to."

The recently defeated Measure L would have helped change that, if the money it raised had gone to fund libraries. At the Aptos branch, Smith said the money would have been used to add librarians, buy books, enlarge the parking lot, and keep the doors open about 10 more hours a week.

Smith emphasized that the two decade-old library is not just an Aptos landmark, but a building owned by the public, and available for it to use.

"The first thing I'd like people to think of when they see the Aptos Library is that it's theirs — it's not a public building to drive by, but they've helped pay for it, and whatever is in it is theirs, and they have a right to come in and use it however they need to."

"For people who are planning on changing jobs or maybe have just lost their job, we've got answers to a lot of their questions — from job hotlines in California, to how to do a good resume, to knowing their rights in the workplace — because we have a fair amount of employer/employee law."

Adept at finding even the most unavailable information, Smith recounts that she once spent almost two months on a 12-year-old boy's request for the call numbers of Sky King's airplane on the 1950's TV show. Since the television studio had no record, the library ended up writing to the airplane company that had the records of the stunt plane used in the show.