

Library Understaffed libraries cut the frills

By Terri Morgan
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The frills are gone in the Santa Cruz County public library system.

The system is massively understaffed, particularly at the branch level, said Anne M. Turner, director of the library system. Funding has remained level, she said, but costs have gone up.

"Our response is that we're trying to be as focused as we can on our basic information services by cutting little things that we'd love to continue," Turner said.

At the Scotts Valley branch library, the staff no longer can accommodate teachers who want to bring classes into the library for visits.

Special events at the Boulder Creek branch have been put on hold. At the Felton branch, the

staff relies heavily on volunteers to run the children's story hour program. At the Aptos library, where book circulation is second only to the central branch in downtown Santa Cruz, the popular magazine recycling program has been discontinued.

"It was a very unpopular decision, but we finally had to bite the bullet," said Heidi Smith, manager of the Aptos library. "It was taking four to six hours a week of staff time to handle all the gift magazines coming in. We're just looking at ways to conserve the energy of the employees we have."

Other branches have cut similar services, and the library recently discontinued telephone renewals systemwide. "While someone's doing that, a patron isn't being helped," Turner explained.

While extra services have been slashed, book lending and telephone requests for reference information have increased steadily during the past year, partly because people tend to use libraries more during a recession. As a result, librarians throughout the county system are struggling to keep their heads above water.

"It's very depressing," Turner said. "Libraries are our greatest cultural resource in a community. I don't see any light at the end of the tunnel."

IF YOU'RE INTERESTED

The non-profit Friends of the Libraries raises funds that go to the Santa Cruz County public library system. It can be reached by calling (408) 429-3495 or by writing to 224 Church St., Santa Cruz 95060.

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