

Local Librarian Laments Reduction in Patrons

by Cliff Branch

"I don't like the idea of this being a token library, a nice little building for the community just to have," remarked a distraught Ben Lomond branch librarian Jeanine Stevens earlier this week.

Stevens and other Santa Cruz city-county library officials are unhappy because the Ben Lomond branch has been getting such little use since it was reopened about a month ago following its post proposition 13 shutdown.

Circulation figures are slumping. Stevens reports that on occasion she has spent as long as two hours in her library with nary a person inside.

Indications are that if things don't pick up the library will likely be closed again in July.

Figures for January show that a total of 251 books were checked out of Ben Lomond this last month, compared to 3,216 at the branch in Felton, and 2,184 at Boulder Creek.

Ben Lomond's circulation is not expected to approach that of the other two Valley branches as they both contain more than triple the amount of books than does Ben Lomond.

More disappointing, however, is the fact that Ben Lomond's circulation total

from last month is only about half as much as its total from the same month last year.

"Things have started off slowly and I've hoped they would have picked up by now," Stevens said. "I thought that the people in Ben Lomond would have shown they appreciate this library more after they lost it for a while."

Stevens suggested that possibly the public just isn't used to the fact that the Ben Lomond branch is open again. "But there has been plenty of publicity in the local papers," she added.

Asked if the abnormally cold weather of late might be holding people back, Stevens said probably not. "If anything, business is usually better when it's very cold or rainy because people come in and want to stock up on books so they can stay home and read."

Rosemary Millburn, the woman who directs the county library system's branch operations noted that at least for now the Ben Lomond branch seems to have lost some of its former regular patrons to Felton.

"While Ben Lomond was closed a number of its normal patrons started going to Felton and they haven't switched back yet," said Millburn.

Both Stevens and Millburn point out that it will be very difficult for anyone to argue in behalf of keeping the Ben Lomond branch open if things don't pick up there dramatically.

The Ben Lomond branch was closed last fall in the wake of proposition 13. The underlying idea was to eliminate the county's minor branch libraries in order to feed more money into the

main library main branches.

The local branch was reopened after county supervisors decided to appropriate an additional \$26,000 to the library system for the duration of this fiscal year.

Several citizens in Ben Lomond were instrumental in the city-county library boards' decision to reopen the branch through their lobbying efforts on the board's directors.

Both Stevens and Millburn now point out that it will be very difficult for anyone to argue on behalf of keeping the Ben Lomond branch open when funding runs out. The recent allocation is good enough to keep the branch open until July. "Traditionally, the main criterion for deciding on funding for the branches is circulation," Millburn said.

Asked if she thought it was a mistake to reopen the local branch, Millburn said she was unable to comment insofar as it was not her position to make the decision in the first place.

Asked the same question, Stevens commented, "I'm

willing to give the people a chance, but I don't want the library to be open and go unused."

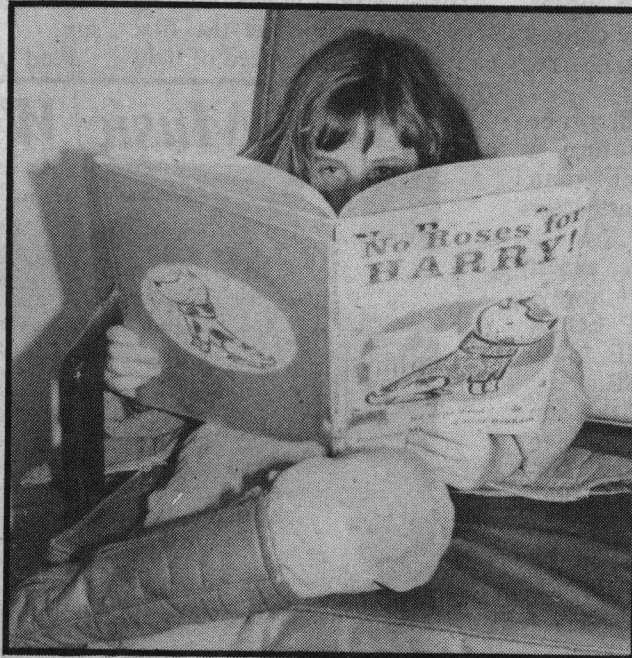
"It's expensive to keep the library open and I don't think the taxpayers are happy about paying for it if it's unused.

"I'm happiest when it's busy here. Times when someone comes in and is looking for a specific book and we have it."

Otherwise, Stevens noted that through the branch any book in print can be obtained. If it's not already in the library system's collection, there are other special services through which it can be obtained.

Stevens noted that some local citizens have been extremely generous in helping the Ben Lomond branch along. Several have donated boxes of recent best selling paperbacks and other books to beef up the library's collection.

Most prevalent among the patrons who are using the branch are elderly readers of fiction and mysteries, said Stevens.



In Ben Lomond, reading is still in — at least with some such as this young Ben Lomond library patron. As for others, well, the library which was reopened last month is suffering from a very limited use thus far.

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