

BC Library — a history of cooperation

By Bill Kirkham

From early in the century when their public reading supply was housed in one room of the old WCTU building, Boulder Creek residents have consistently planned, toiled and fought to improve their library. Their efforts found fruition in what has been described as "the cultural jewel of the North County" on West Park Avenue just off of Highway 9.

Intermediate success came in 1951 when a 20-by-40 building was moved to a spot next to the Fire Department and served as the Boulder Creek branch of the city/county library system. It provided a little more space than the old site in the WCTU building but was still inadequate to satisfy the community's cultural thirst.

In 1979 the Boulder Creek Chapter of the Friends of the Library was formed with seven charter members — Anne Gulliver, Carol Rice, Betty Bernstein, Shirley Gleason, Margaret De Smet, Pat Haworth and Nancy Carlson. They met once a month, at first to perform such mundane tasks as washing the covers of children's books, later rearranging the small window spaces for displays, and then in the fall of 1979 holding the first open house. Local residents Martha Pruitt, who is still active in the Chapter, and Ruth Turner assisted the librarian, while Gulliver conducted a weekly story hour in a tiny 8-by-10 foot space.

"To meet the needs of the community it was obvious that more space and a better location was necessary," recalls Gulliver. "Every time that there was a fire, library activities had to stop because of the noise of the firemen and trucks next door."

Because of this and other drawbacks the local chapter of Friends of the Library embarked on the awesome task of convincing the Board of Supervisors and the Board of Library Trustees that Boulder Creek badly needed a new and bigger facility. "But it took the people of the town to tell them just how great the need was," says Gulliver. "Jim Lee, then president of the Business Association organized a community committee of business leaders, school representatives, the Valley Women's Club and individuals and organizations. They wrote letters to the governing agencies and to the local papers and many of them went with us to the supervisors and trustees to argue the cause." At that time action was promised but nothing happened.

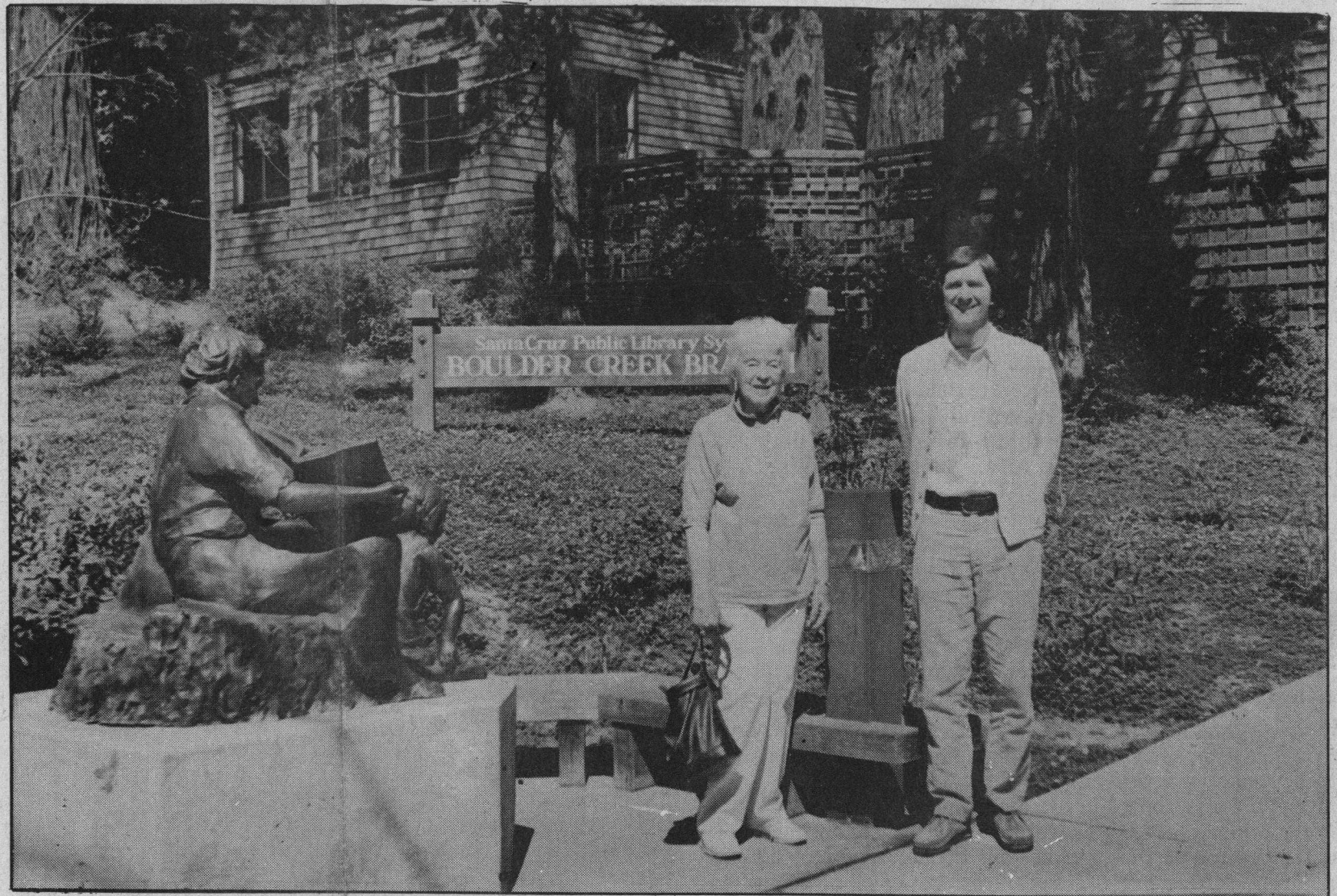
She recalls Charles Wise and Theresa Keane, then fourth-graders and now students at Santa Clara University and Cabrillo College respectively, appearing with their mothers, School Board Trustees Anne Wise and Sondra Keane. "We need a new library," Charles emphatically told the Library Board. "Besides," added Theresa, "the firemen want their building back!"

In early 1980 Lee arranged for a developer, Robert Kuerzel, to donate the present 1.3 acre site, but with the deed provision that the library would have to be built within five years. Because of this limitation and underground conditions that precluded a leach field the Board of Supervisors tabled the offer. However, after Joe Cucchiara was elected in November, he was able to obtain a variance permitting a frequently pumped septic tank in lieu of a leach field. In January, 1981 Lee was appointed to the Library Board and Cucchiara convinced the Board of Supervisors that a 4,600 square foot facility should be built.

The design contract was awarded in June, 1982 to architects Jeff Oberdorfer of Santa Cruz and Peter Calthorpe of Sausalito — both disciples of "participatory architecture" — a concept which allowed the local residents to tell the architects what kind of building they wanted.

"I wanted closer contact with the community. I enjoy the human element, the human touch — and that I get here in abundance."

— Library Branch Manager Fred Ulrich



Anne Gulliver, left, of Friends of the Library and library branch manager Fred Ulrich stand in front of the

Boulder Creek library by Bonnie Chancellor's bronze statue, "Mountain Woman."

Three workshops were held, with a finished model presented and approved by the community at the final meeting. It was also during this period that long-time resident and sculptor Bonnie Chancellor presented her sketch of "Mountain Woman" the present bronze sculpture at the library's entrance. Grosword Construction was awarded the building contract and groundbreaking occurred April 25, 1984 with the burial of a time capsule.

The following March 1 the Valley witnessed one of the most enthusiastic and colorful dedications in its history, with the Boulder Creek residents physically moving all of the books from the old library to the new. The librarian was Pam Downing who succeeded long-time librarian June Brocius who had died Oct. 4, 1984, and in whose memory the new Boulder Creek library was dedicated.

Present Branch Manager Fred Ulrich has a Master's Degree in Library and Informational Sciences from the University of Texas and came to the city/county system after serving as reference librarian for the Austin Public Libraries and the North Olympic Library System in Washington; as a bibliographic instructor and reference librarian at Stanford University and Foothill College; and as the author of a textbook on library research used in classes at Foothill, the credits for which are transferrable to the University of California system. He joined the Santa Cruz system, he says, because "I wanted closer contact with the community. I enjoy the human element, the human touch — and that I get here in abundance."

Ulrich expresses pride in the facility which he points out is the fruition of the community's efforts, saying, "The people of this town have made the Boulder Creek Library one of the cultural centers of Santa Cruz County." He cites the ever-increasing circulation since 1985 noting as an

example that 1988 showed an increase of 25 percent over the previous year which, according to system records, is a far greater increase than any other branch in the county.

Boulder Creek was the first branch to offer video tapes and now offers 50 new selections each month, featuring old classic movies, PBS documentaries and educational materials. At any given time 66 percent of these tapes are in circulation. The library's available material is an indication of its growth: At its 1985 opening 7,000 volumes were moved from the old library, and 11,000 more were brought it from elsewhere in the system. Today it is at capacity with 25,000 volumes.

Story hours are on Thursdays at 11 a.m. in the spacious and airy children's room. Special events are scheduled every two months. "Shakespeare to Go" featuring "Romeo and Juliet" — a presentation of the Santa Cruz Shakespeare Group — will be presented on April 6. The "Dancing Man," Djaraj Maxfield, will perform for the children's Pajama Program May 17 at 7 p.m. May 25 will inaugurate the Book Talk Series by folklorist and story teller Ed Sandberg.

Past the "Mountain Woman" at the foot of the stairs, the entrance gallery's floor mosaic depicts "hands reaching out for knowledge," and the wall decoration is changed each month to reflect the works of local artists. This month's are devoted to silk screens by Judie Mountain-Saliner showing native people of South America. Over the foyer is a stained-glass window, "Setting Off for New Worlds" by Virginia Fordice donated in memory of her son.

An overall, one-word description of the Boulder Creek Library was recently voiced by a Valley newcomer who pronounced it "incredible."