

Libraries 1980-1989

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Use Your Library But Return Books on Time

By MILDRED ANN SMITH
Sentinel Women's Editor

April 13-19 is National Library Week. Inaugurated in 1958, theme of this week's celebration is "America's greatest bargain — the library."

Staff members throughout the county are inviting you to visit the library nearest you to discover what a bargain your library really is.

But they also want to remind you that if you don't return your books, records or magazines on time, not only are you causing excessive paperwork for the staff and wasting tax dollars, but you're short-changing other readers as well.

Says Charles Atkins, system librarian, "The Santa Cruz Library is featuring a display on overdue, lost and damaged books during this week to make patrons aware of the great cost of unreturned materials. It is estimated that loss to the library is in excess of \$50,000 a year."

Eleanor Gregory, in charge of the overdue department, reminds that the library has a long checkout period of three weeks plus renewal for three weeks and yet items are kept 5-10 weeks after that; some even 18-24 months before finally being returned.

"The current display at the library illustrates the tremendous volume of unreturned material we are dealing with," she says. "The computer printout for February, for instance, covers an area 4x9-feet. Imagine typing the overdue notices."

"Think of the new materials we could buy if we didn't have monthly postage bills for around 5000 overdue items and then second notices for those who ignore the first. We get to know some people pretty well this way."

She says that since January a new system is being used to track down materials. Library cards now are dated if the person has no materials long overdue. Another check will be run in mid-year. If a patron has \$30 of material overdue, he temporarily loses his library privileges.

"Many materials now are coming back and more are being paid for. People are locating books in unlikely places like under the bed, in the car trunk, and retrieving them from friends ex-friends and ex-friends."

"It is interesting to note that we have few overdues in the two areas where people pay money to take books out — our Rental Library and our Deposit Card."

Eleanor says when total overdues for one person or family exceeds \$50, someone is sent out to collect. For a time an employee connected with the county branches collected overdue books, records and art material almost equalling his salary every month. "Unfortunately, we lost him when the library system had to cut back."

The library has been charging a small fine of five cents a day with \$1 maximum, probably one of the rare items that hasn't been hit by inflation. As of May 1 the fine will go up to 10 cents a day.

Damage to books, records and other items are another problem. Separate letters are sent on each damaged item. The rainy season and the beach take a particularly hard toll.

Eleanor says only about one-half of the damaged items returned are paid for and replaced. "It is a shame that so many books and records, especially children's records, are never paid for and if replaced, the funds must come from the new book budget."

She stresses that librarians are more than grateful to users who check out dozen of books and never have an overdue. "We know your names well, too. Those that pleasantly pay their small fines know they could never buy their own books for that amount. We also are appreciative of those who donate their books and magazines as they finish them."

"And we are happy when parents help their children to use the library rather than complacently ignore their enthusiastic misuse. We are glad that so many take advantage of our many services instead of just taking advantage!"