

## OPEN FORUM

LIBRARY  
BLUES

*Open Forum is a public commentary column to allow for local residents to express their viewpoint on issues of general interest. Opinions expressed in Open Forum do not necessarily reflect those of The Post. Submissions for Open Forum may be mailed to: Editor, Mid-County Post, 1840 41st Avenue, Suite 201, Capitola CA 95010. Articles received for consideration will not be returned unless you provide a self-addressed stamped envelope.*

by David Heron

The Dial-up Catalog is the Santa Cruz Public Library's newest service. Anyone with a computer and standard modem can not only look up books in the library's catalog, but have them transferred from one branch to another for convenient delivery—all without leaving the house. Director Anne Turner reports that it was used 1200 times during its first week of operation in late May.

The library is Santa Cruz County's treasure house of fact, fiction, entertainment, education, and elusive information. If you are buying a new car or fixing an old one, looking for a mutual fund, tracing the family tree, building a deck, teaching a four-year-old to read, planning a trip, or just fell like escaping with a new Danielle Steel, the library is the place to find what you need. In the American library tradition it is open, free, to everybody in the county.

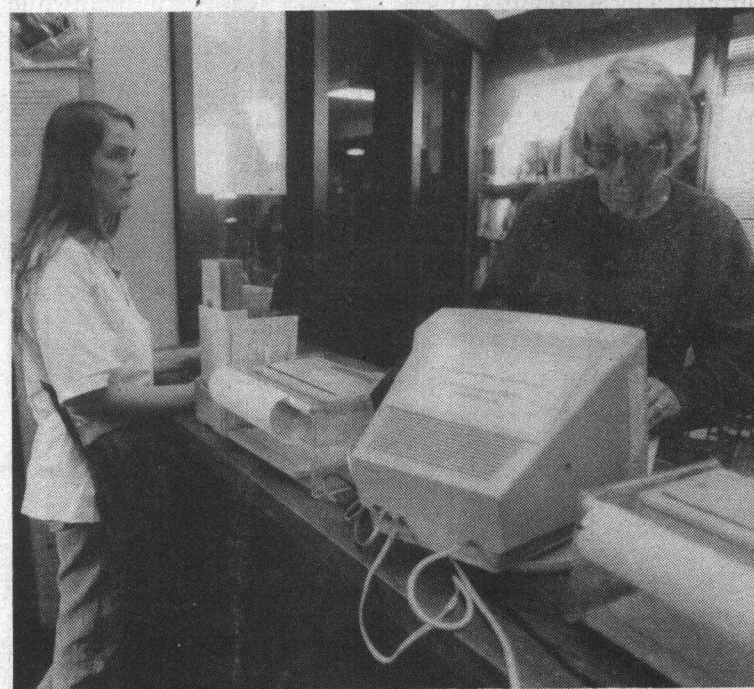
It has Dr. Seuss and Tin-Tin, Garrison Keillor in print or on tape (either audio or video), Page Smith's history of the United States, Moody's *Industrials*, the *Magazine Index* on film, the *Physician's Desk Refer-*

*ence*, the *World Almanac*, the *Kelly Blue Book*, Fodor's *Florence and Venice*, the *Universal Building Code*, the *New York Times* on microfilm, a hundred year index to *National Geographic*, the Fresno phone book, and an up-to-date file of *Mid-County Post*.

The catalog terminals will find you books, anywhere in the library system, on AIDS, artichokes, Xenophon or Xerxes, and will tell you where they are. It will show you a full list of the library's collection of Somerset Maugham, and of books whose titles start with "Satanic" or include the word "sanctuary". If you can't find what you need the librarians will help you. The computer catalog, which libraries have had since 1985, still seems strange to some people more inclined to card files, but it will do a lot of things for you that the old card catalog couldn't do.

The library buildings themselves are generally pleasant places in which to read, ranging from the solid Bauhaus Ranch style of the central library to Felton's little Victorian chapel and the tiny William Weeks masterpiece in Garfield Park. They have comfortable lounge chairs, convenient tables, and good light. As a rule they have interesting exhibits of art or of books and artifacts related to the libraries' resources.

During the peak hours, like Monday and Tuesday afternoons, you may find them a little crowded, particularly the Aptos Library on Soquel Drive and the Central Library on Church Street. The Central Library charged out over half a million books, magazines, and tapes last year, and the Aptos branch almost a quarter million.



These days you may have to stand in line for service. Current hours are shorter than they used to be, and they vary from branch to branch. None of the libraries are open on Sundays; even the big branches close at five on Fridays and Saturdays, and several have even shorter schedules. Some months ago the handy service which made it possible to renew books by phone was discontinued, and unpaid fines of \$25 or more are now turned over to a collection agency. The Friends of the Library book sales, which have added \$36,000 to the library's income during the past year, continue to offer popular bargains, but some of the branches no longer accept gifts of magazines or give away their duplicates.

Population growth and the recession have combined to cause booming attendance in the Santa Cruz Libraries. There are 134,000 registered borrowers, well over half the 1990 census population of the county. In addition to the normal demand for information and reading matter, people come looking

for help wanted ads, for advice on career changes and for books on writing resumes. The unemployed or underemployed have more time to read, and more need for how-to-it books; the library is a reassuring place to be during the depressing experience of being jobless.

At a time when business is booming in the libraries (recorded use of books rising more than ten per cent per year), their future is uncertain. The recession and the state deficit put the library's budget in serious jeopardy.

In late July Chairman John Mahaney convened the Library Oversight Committee (Mahaney and Kennedy from the Santa Cruz City Council and County Supervisors Levy and Beutz), with senior library staff members, the Citizens' Advisory Committee, and officers of the Friends of the Library, to contemplate cuts in the budget expected from the trickle-down misery now slowly gestating in Sacramento. Two thirds of the library's \$4.6 million budget comes from the county, which is anticipating bad news from the state, and

one third from the city of Santa Cruz, similarly threatened. A third of the library's modest book budget has been supported by direct state subsidy, which looks vulnerable.

What will this do to library service?

The city of Santa Cruz has frozen all vacant positions, of which the library currently has four, and although there was no public discussion by the Oversight Committee of firing staff and closing branch libraries, Supervisor Beutz did ask Director Turner to calculate the savings from further reducing library hours. The library staff has discussed the possible effect of two-week unpaid furloughs, anticipating some opposition from a strong, nationally affiliated union.

Turner reported two 1991-92 Grand Jury recommendations, that more local tax funds be invested in books (the book fund gets only 8.25% of the current budget) and that Capitola and Scotts Valley should be contributing a larger share of the cost of the library system. Neither city's share is now proportional to their growing populations and tax bases. In light of Scotts Valley's having reduced its 1992-92 contribution and the number of business failures in both communities, this appears to be an idea whose time has not quite arrived.

The Oversight Committee and the library administration face some difficult decisions, and Anne Turner and John Mahaney are trying to avoid surprising either the staff or the public with what is likely to be bad news when county and city budgets allocate what little was left them when the duel between Governor Wilson and Brown finally ground to an end.

Santa Cruz County's excellent libraries are in danger, and people of the county can expect fewer new books and less convenient access to the libraries' resources. □