

New libraries to be or not to be—that's the question

By Jim Ames

Do San Lorenzo Valley residents want to retain their three branch libraries, or would they prefer two larger facilities that would be located in Boulder Creek and somewhere near Felton?

That is the question which Eleanor Engstrand of Ben Lomond, the newest member of the city-county board of library trustees, would like answered more definitively.

She, along with the other six members of the library board, are presently grappling with the problem of trying to decide what to do about library service in the Valley.

At a meeting last week of a library board subcommittee formed to explore Valley library service, Charles Atkins, head county librarian, was highly critical of the present libraries at Felton, Ben Lomond and Boulder Creek.

He feels "they do not meet the minimum of standards of library service and they are not meeting the library needs of the people in the Valley."

He wants to replace the three Valley libraries with a larger facility in Boulder Creek and a "regional library" in Felton.

A number of Valley residents, however, have said they want to keep the three branches as they are. A questionnaire conducted late last year showed that 237 of the 390 persons responding favored retaining the existing three branches.

Questioned last week, Engstrand said she is still "on the fence" on the issue.

"I shop at Ben Lomond Super and the Ben Lomond library is convenient. I don't think it has a good enough collection or long enough hours to make it very attractive at this time.

"I'd really like to get more public opinion. I'd like to find out what people really think before I come to any conclusion," she said.

She did say "I think there should be a

separate library in Boulder Creek."

Regarding a regional library to serve Ben Lomond and Felton she said, "You'll have a bigger collection, a better reference collection if you have one library.

"On the other hand the only expression of public opinion so far has been the questionnaire, in which the majority of those who answered said they wanted separate libraries.

"Mr. Atkins definitely wants one (a combined library).

"The impression I have gotten is that the trustees don't have definite opinions. They want to be responsive to public opinion. And they want good libraries.

"The questionnaire was only answered by a small number of people. It doesn't seem like a final and definitive statement of public opinion.

"Someone called me this morning to say that she only wanted one library. She has to take her children into Santa Cruz now to do their school work. She wanted a library in the Valley they could use.

"I think the board is trying to find out what people in the Valley really want. Local citizens should certainly be encouraged to get in touch with members of the library board to let them know what they want," said Engstrand.

Although not committing herself on the issue, she did say, "I tend to think that books are the most important thing. Books and service. I don't think that you necessarily have to have fancy quarters.

"I worked at the University library in Berkeley for some time. Some branches were fancy and some were not. It seemed to be the quality of service that attracted people."

Another Ben Lomond resident who attended last week's subcommittee meeting was Faye Ellis. A spokesman for Citizens for Better Valley Libraries, she has been a frequent critic of Atkins and the

priorities he has set for Valley library service.

She said she opposes a regional library for the Valley.

While agreeing that Boulder Creek needs a new library facility, she would like to see the Felton and Ben Lomond branches retained, although with more books and longer hours.

"I feel very strongly that the Valley wants to retain its three libraries," she said.

"We're going to have to downgrade our expectations all the way around," she said. "I don't think we can expect everything to keep expanding and getting bigger. There just isn't enough money to do that forever.

"He (Atkins) doesn't really consider the communities' needs. He is more concerned with what he thinks the Valley should have from the point of view of a professional librarian.

"We are not Aptos. The people here are very community-minded. Each community does its own thing."

She said, "Some of our problem is Mr. Atkins. He is so uncooperative, so difficult to deal with. If there were another person in there it would be so much easier for us to deal with the situation."

She was critical of Atkins' spending policies.

"I am concerned about the costs. I feel we should do the best we can for the lowest amount of money.

"We are all going to pay the taxes whether we go to the library or not.

"He buys real expensive equipment, books from the most expensive jobber. He does everything first class. I don't think all of this is necessary. You do not need a chrome paperback rack at Felton.

"We have a completely different philosophy in dealing with this situation. We don't personally get anything out of building a new building. It doesn't do anything for our ego."