

**Director of County Library Services Report
for
December, 2009**

BRANCH NEWS –

‘YOU DID GREAT WORK’ AWARDS

This month I inaugurated what I plan to be the first of a series of recognition awards given to local branches for accomplishing something particularly noteworthy. With all the talk of budget cuts and the many changes we are going through as an organization, I thought it was only appropriate to recognize the truly extraordinary efforts that our staff puts forward and to show appreciation for their flexibility and creativity and continued excellent customer service. Accomplishments and achievements that are linked to MCFL’s system-wide Goals and Services will be given priority for recognition and any staff member is able to send nominations in. (So far the award is nameless – I’m hoping for something clever to emerge.) The first award goes to the Corte Madera Library for achieving an astonishing 80.94% rate of customer self-check out. This was a carefully planned project to help their patrons become more independent, thus freeing staff from routine check outs to concentrate on problem solving and assisting patrons with complex transactions. Corte Madera’s award of choice was a pizza party, which was enjoyed by all the branch staff.

LITERACY

I am pleased to announce that Stella McCready has been selected by the Marin County Human Rights Commission as one of the recipients of this year’s Martin Luther King, Jr. Humanitarian Award. The award is given for “outstanding efforts to promote human rights and civil rights in your community” and we are all proud that Stella and the Marin Literacy Program (a joint program of the San Rafael Library and Marin County Free Library) have been recognized for the impact they have on so many lives.

MLP nominated Stella McCready for her many years of literacy work at the County Jail. In addition to her jail tutoring, she has worked in the Literacy office, served as a Trainer and developed some of the Training materials, and has led many workshops that have inspired tutors and students. Stella receives \$1000 to be given to a nonprofit, and she is donating the award to MLP for Inmate Literacy Services – thanks, Stella!

Stella will be honored at a dinner on January 21 and hopefully there will be some IJ coverage, spotlighting the important contributions that our Literacy program makes to our community.

EMPLOYEE SURVEY

In 2006 and 2009 the County conducted an employee survey and we just got back our departmental results for 2009. We had extremely good participation – in 2006, 101 employees participated, with most questions being answered by 89-98 respondents. That is literally almost all of our employees, including MARINet and Literacy folks. This year 77 employees participated, still an excellent response and reflective of the drop in our overall employee count. Most questions were answered by 63-73 respondents. What did we learn? We scored well above the County average on most questions – people felt that the Library helps them understand how their work contributes to what the County is trying to accomplish; that we value differences, recognize employee achievements, listen to ideas; operate with integrity. There were two questions that showed areas that we will need to work on, neither a surprise. Although we were still well above the County average, the number of folks who felt they had opportunities to keep their skills and knowledge up-to-date in their field dropped from 79% in 2006 to 66% in 2009. The question was asked as a Countywide training question, but was probably interpreted Department wide and reflects our cuts to the training and conference budgets as money has gotten tighter. The other question “Do you consistently receive an annual performance evaluation” showed a much smaller drop and was still above the County average, but is something that we need to improve. Analysis shows that those departments with the highest rate of completed evaluations also have the highest rates of employee satisfaction. In the Library we tend to be really diligent about evaluations for the first five years because they have money attached. After an employee reaches the fifth step of their position there are no more merit raises and supervisors become more lax. One of our internal goals this year is to improve our 62% completion rate to at least 75%.

BOOKMOBILE

Notes from Terry Jones -

December is a wonderful month to be reminded of the pleasures of working in a library--especially a mobile one! No matter what their holiday traditions, our patrons take time to express their appreciation----sometimes accompanied by a gift. The Union School students Cookie Book is a treasure and proves that chocolate chip cookies are a perennial favorite---- (3 out of the 10 recipes). Chocolates, persimmons, poinsettias, homemade fudge, handmade tamales, drawings, cards----the list goes on. Even during this year of financial hardship for many, our patrons found a way to share something special with us. Truly the greatest gift is sharing the appreciation of books and movies with our enthusiastic patrons.

We saw performance of The Incredible Reindeer by Union School's 10 students. As our play opens, Santa and the elves are facing a dilemma----it's another foggy Christmas night and Rudolph (with a red blinking nose) has a head cold. What's Santa to do?

And if that isn't enough, an asteroid is headed directly for the North Pole and will destroy all of them and Christmas too. Just the right dramatic tension to sing "What We Need is a Miracle" (skillfully done complete with 2 solos). Look, up in the sky, what could those bright lights be? Why, the Incredible Reindeer with super powers. Now take a moment and picture this-----Santa is played by kindergartener who remembers his lines but has a little trouble with his Santa belly which shifts from side to side during the tension. The Incredible Reindeer have a few "costume malfunctions" of their own----Hyper Speed's magic antlers and his cape tangle with each other a bit, Mighty Moose's bulging muscles (built into his shirt) move up and down from time to time, and Robo Guy's bionic equipment (calculator and flashlight) is hard to keep hold of from inside a tin foil covered box. Still, the show must go on and the Incredible Reindeer chase the asteroid around the desks of the one room school house. With a loud bang----the sound of an air filled paper bag being popped----the asteroid is destroyed and Christmas is saved! Laser Squint with his atomic laser vision leads Santa's sleigh through the fog and all is well in the universe. Wow----does it get any better than this?

FAIRFAX

In what we think is an historical first, Fairfax checked out more items than Novato on Monday December 28th. This might have been caused by the onset of the Blue Moon, but more likely because San Rafael Public was closed on Monday and the San Anselmo Library was closed for the holiday week. Hopefully some of the patrons who discovered us will be return customers in the future.

BUDGET/MANAGING FOR RESULTS

On December 15th the Board of Supervisors met in a special afternoon workshop to discuss the County's fiscal position and to look at possible budget cutting measures. The discussion was fairly high level and did not extend to looking at individual departments cuts, but it was encouraging to see that the Board clearly understands that serious cuts will need to be made and that those cuts will almost certainly lead to employees losing their positions. They all spoke eloquently about how much they appreciated County staff and about how difficult the choices in front of them are. You will remember that the library has presented 3 cost cutting options to the Board: eliminate Sunday hours at the 3 branches that are open; close the Civic Center branch on Saturday; reduce hours so that no branch is open more than 8 hours in a day. One revenue generating initiative was proposed – a \$49 parcel tax to be placed on the ballot in June.

January is the month that Scott, Andrew Yon and I meet with all the branch managers to capture any on-going saving and make any budget adjustments necessary, and then plan for next year's budget.

PERSONEL

We have accepted the resignation of our Electronic Services Librarian, David Cloutman. David was offered a position with a start-up in his home town of San Francisco and just couldn't resist the challenge. With this unexpected turn of events we are taking the

opportunity to look at our electronic services with an eye to perhaps taking a different path than had been planned. If indeed we have to make major budget cuts this coming year it will be more important than even to have a way to make our collections accessible to our users 24/7.

DONATIONS

Thanks to the generous Holiday Charity Book Drive that Borders Bookstore sponsored during November and December, the San Rafael and Marin County Free Public Libraries will receive almost 1,800 books valued at about \$12,000. Our librarians selected children and teen titles and store customers were able to purchase them as a donation for the library. As the flyer said - "In this challenging economy, the gift of reading is truly a sustainable gift that lasts a lifetime. By participating in this book drive, you'll support your retail bookstore, your public library, and together we all support our community. "MCFL will use the donated books to fill out our collections, in outreach to help families grow their own readers at home, for day care centers to read to young children, for older children in foster homes and juvenile hall who don't have easy access to a library, and as prizes for our summer reading program to keep children and teens in the habit of reading throughout the year. If you are a Borders customer, be sure to thank them the next time you are in the store.

COLLECTION DEVELOPMENT

Last month I mentioned that we are retiring our VHS collection and the process has gone smoothly. In Fairfax, they are offering some videos to the local schools and will share others with an assisted living facility; other branches are making similar arrangements. Those in the best condition are being offered for sale through the Friends, either locally at the branch or through the Book Place. Reaction from the public has been mostly neutral. No one has seemed very surprised that we're discontinuing the collection. Some have asked if they can buy their favorites (yes, see above) and a few have asked what we'll use the space for (in Fairfax, an expanded Teen area.)