



Say No to Library Cuts

by Joshua Yates

Recently, while working on a World History paper, I needed to do research at the Canyon Vista Public Library. My mother drove me to the library, and we arrived at 9:10 a.m., 10 minutes after the library opened—or so we thought. When we arrived, however, the library was closed. About a dozen people were milling about the glass front doors, wearing puzzled expressions and muttering with frustration. A sign printed in heavy black ink announced, “REDUCED LIBRARY HOURS DUE TO CITY BUDGET CUTS.” According to an article in the May 4, 2004, Canyon Vista *Lookout*, Mayor Arnold Eckrich has ordered cuts in the library’s budget because of decreased tax revenues. The library has cut not only its hours but also a number of programs and services. While the city is facing some real economic challenges, I think it is wrong to cut funding to the library. When libraries suffer, the whole community suffers. The funding of the public library should be protected because the library offers important programs and services that benefit the whole community.

According to Library Director Sarah Tomlinson, whom I interviewed on May 6, the budget cuts will force the library to discontinue many popular programs and services. For example, the bookmobile will stop running at the end of this summer. “I’m sad to see the bookmobile go,” said Ms. Tomlinson, “because it brings the library to people who find it hard to come to us.” These people include disadvantaged children and migrant workers on the city’s west side, as well as many senior citizens in nursing homes. I asked Manuela Galarda, director of the Westminster Gardens retirement community, how Westminster residents will be affected when the bookmobile stops running. “They will be terribly disappointed,” she said. “Many residents have come to rely on the weekly visits of the bookmobile. It will be like losing an old friend. They enjoy reading, but now they will have less to read.”

The budget cuts at the library also mean the end of the Children’s Story Hour. I have fond memories of Story Hour at the library. I began attending these weekly events even before I was able to read; I was three or four years old, according to my mother. Over the years, sitting in a circle with many other children, I must have listened to dozens of wonderful stories and poems. The African tale of Anansi the spider made me laugh out loud, while the Native American tale of the Rough-Faced Girl filled me with wonder and suspense. “The Story Hour has been one of our most popular programs,” said Tomlinson. “Reading aloud helps bring literature to life for children, and I’m worried that without Story Hour, the kids will be getting more TV and less good literature.”

The most important effects of the library cuts will not be limited to children, senior citizens, or other specific groups. The effects will be felt by our whole city. According to the Canyon Vista Library website, the library serves 70,000 residents. The annual circulation of the library is .5 million volumes. That statistic means that the residents of our city borrowed approximately a half million books from the library last year. In addition, they were able to use the computers for word processing, to reserve the public meeting rooms for community events, and to borrow books from other libraries through the inter-library loan service.

Tomlinson explained that with less money available, the library will not be able to purchase as many new books and other materials. As Tomlinson told me, “The cutback on new materials hurts everyone who needs to find information—and that includes just about all residents of Canyon Vista.” The library’s reference collection will not be as complete or up-to-date as in the past. Many Canyon Vista residents rely on the library’s reference materials: for example, students writing reports, teens and their parents searching for information on colleges, adults and teens looking for jobs, and people searching for information on their ancestors. In the future, they may find that a reduced library budget keeps them from getting the information they need.



The cuts in the library budget will also force reductions in the library staff. For example, the *Lookout* estimates that at least one full-time and three part-time librarians will be laid off. Of course, a layoff affects the families of the employees who lose their jobs, but it also affects all of us who use the library. When we need help finding information, there will be fewer librarians to help us. According to Tomlinson, “The late afternoon is the time that people will notice the reduction in staff.” That part of the day, Tomlinson explained, is “our assistance time,” the time when students, their parents, and people just getting off from work come to the library. They are looking, Tomlinson added, for a librarian’s help “to find a book, to answer questions about reference materials, to do advanced searches on the Internet, or just to check out books for them.” Tomlinson sighed, “I hope people will be patient with us as we try to handle each person’s request.”

While it is true that the city has to cut the budget, the city does not have to take the funds from the library. The library plays too great a role in our community. Instead of reducing the budget for the library, the mayor could delay for one year the proposed changes to the city’s recycling program. Residents can continue to have only one curbside pick-up per week for recycling instead of increasing it to two, as had been planned in this year’s budget. The funds appropriated for the additional recycling collection can go to the library instead.

When you add up all the ways the library helps people, you will realize that almost everyone in our community uses and needs the library. You can let Mayor Eckrich and his staff know how much you value the library and all that it offers. Write letters or e-mails to the mayor and to the *Lookout*. Let your voice be heard. Support full funding for our library so that it can continue to offer the important services and programs that benefit all of the residents of our community.