



Rural Library Service Newsletter



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Rural Libraries: Not Just a Small Town Concern

As a prerequisite for services, regional libraries often establish requirements for membership such as a minimum for per capita expenditure, hours open and total volumes held. Some libraries however find the membership criteria difficult to meet. For example there are in Texas rural libraries that have a problem meeting the minimum per capita dollar support because of absentee landowners reluctance to tax themselves for services for which they will not use. Similarly large ranch owner residents are reluctant to heavily subsidize service at levels which their large holdings and local service needs would demand.

It is not uncommon for the library to be viewed by local governing bodies as a good thing but having no direct relevance to their personal life. A view held by some rural and conservative officials would be "My bible and the Sears catalog is all the materials that I need." The individuals who hold this limited view of library service and also hold important political positions will probably never be sold on the merits of a library for themselves. Because some 295,000 children participated in the State Library of Texas (Continued on Page 2)



Barbara Gubbin, District Coordinator of the San Antonio Major Resource Center Library (SAMRC), attributes the difficulty of attracting the professional librarian to rural Texas in part to the limited cultural, educational, and recreational offerings by rural communities. Weak financial support of the library and a reluctance by local officials to establish salaries competitive with urban librarians also hurt the drawing of the professional to rural areas. An average urban librarian salary could make the rural librarian in some counties the second highest paid official next to the county judge, a status which most librarians have not yet reached.

Barbara Gubbin is the District Coordinator of SAMRC headquartered in San Antonio. Born and raised in London, England with a MLS from the University of London, she has worked with Texas rural libraries for the past 5 1/2 years.

Summer Reading Program, it is Ms. Gibbin's belief these officials while blind to their own needs may be open to the merits of library service for children. Therefore one argument for library financial support should demonstrate the benefits to this special population.

Ms. Gubbin notes there is not one woman county commissioner in any of SAMRC's 21 counties. At the same time most of the libraries directorships in rural areas are held by women. Historically while men controlled the city and county governments, libraries generally headed by women have not received the same financial support that men headed departments have received.

There is however a new political librarian emerging in Texas as elsewhere. The political librarian is starting to become more visible and active in the rural as well as the urban political arena. Two years ago pro library forces in Texas joined to raise the state per capita from 16¢ to 31¢. For this biennium Texas librarians are asking for \$1.50 per capita. A coalition of PAC, the State Library Association, hired lobbyist and librarians will be working for increased aid.

To the rural library with its underfunded budgets, political poverty, and recruiting problems; the regional library systems of Texas bring service and assistance. One of Texas's 10 regional districts SAMRC, headquartered in the San Antonio Public Library, offers a wide range of services to the districts thirty-four (34) libraries: interlibrary loan, consultant services, collection development, films, multimedia kits, workshops and incentive programs. SAMRC is headed by a District Coordinator who is answerable to the State Library and the Director of the San Antonio Public Library. The coordinator also receives advice from a lay council of membered libraries and the council's 6 membered executive board. The 34 cities served by SAMRC range from the nearly 1,000,000 people in the San Antonio metropolitan area to Barksdale with 104. The next largest populated city after San Antonio is New Braunfels with 36,000.

In designing programs the regional libraries are confronted with the question, Do regional libraries serve patrons or do they serve libraries?

Some like District Coordinator Barbara Gubbin argues that libraries are the region's patrons. A stringent follower of this philosophy would give equal weight to each library regardless of the population they serve. Therefore San Antonio with a million population and Barksdale with 104 are each eligible for a \$1,000 grant under the region's book purchasing incentive program. On the other hand if services are based on populations than San Antonio with 73% of the region's population would receive the bulk of the regional budget greatly reducing the effectiveness of the regional services to the rural libraries.

Presently San Antonio Public Library receives 51% of the region's budget. Most of this money is used in purchasing materials which in turn is borrowed through an interlibrary loan program by the district libraries.

SAMRC feels one of the long overlooked important links in the rural library service chain is the trustee. This special group, which has immense impact on rural library development, receives very little attention from the library community. Under SAMRC's trustee education program, trustees are instructed on the public library and its role in the regional, state and national picture; informed about their roles and responsibilities; and given tips on how to be more effective. Invited along with trustees to the workshop are the city's mayor, city manager, and council members.

Rural libraries are not just a small town concern. Regional libraries provide direct service to rural populations with Mail-A-Book programs and Bookmobile Service. They also provide back up services and materials to local libraries, and educational opportunities to library practitioners and governing boards. The regional library is an important partner with the local library in the delivery of service to rural populations.

Plugging In To The Future

The potential role of libraries as a technological and communications hub in rural areas was the focus of a joint congressional hearing as part of the World Future Society's convention on the future of communications.

Other witnesses sought a national commitment to support rural libraries as more than just recreational outlets, but as centers for information and learning.

Wyoming, for example, has less than a half-million residents spread over 98,000 sq. miles service by only one four-year university. The University of Wyoming is more than 100 miles away from all but one of the state's junior colleges. On the other hand, the state has a 23-member county library system and 62 branches across the state.

It is clear from these statistics, said Betsy R. Peters, of U. of Wyoming's School of Extended Studies and Public Service, that libraries are the "human link" in the communications wilderness.

For example, an "electronic blackboard" could be set up in local libraries so that a single instructor in one town can teach a class to students across the state.

Libraries can supplement their resources by using computers to plug into those at libraries or businesses elsewhere that have computerized journals, books and magazines...isolated farmers and others could call up information from universities, government agencies and other services on subjects such as the weather, pesticides, and the stock market.

Peters said it would take \$15,000 to outfit a library with the telecommunications and computer equipment needed to link one rural area with another or with urban information centers. The concept, however, would require charging a "small" user fee, she added.

A survey by the group of one rural region showed that more than 60 percent of the

population had sought some form of information during a one year period and that more than half of them had to send it. (via mail or long distance telephone calls).

(Clara Germani, in The Christian Sci. Mon., 7/23/82) Adapted from Administrator Digest, Nov. 1982, Page 68.

Farm Computer Club Offers Library Service

Farmers and agribusinessmen in Sac City, IA. (pop. 3,000) meet once a month to discuss microcomputers and software applications. The group known as agricursors formed in 1980 with 5 interested apple computer users now has a membership of nearly 40. The club offers members training aids, an opportunity to share knowledge, supplemental training, software evaluations, and a library.

Members have \$100 a year membership fee. The money is used to buy training software and other related materials. The club's librarian houses the software, circulates materials, and duplicates for a nominal fee programs that are in the public domain. They scrupulously follow the copyright laws.

They own 200 ag. related programs plus many other software packages of games, business materials, and training aids which they house in their library and make available to the club's members.



Neil Stadlman, vice president and ag-representative for the Sac City State Bank demonstrates a new graphic program for the apple computer at a monthly meeting of Agricursors.

NAL's Blue Ribbon Panel Reports

Responding to patron complaints of inadequate service, lack of Department of Agriculture Support, and fear from the library community that NAL was sliding downhill fast, a blue-ribbon panel was formed by Secretary of Agriculture John Block and NAL Director John Farley to investigate the needs and the problems of the National Agriculture Library. Chairing the panel was Ray Kline of the GSA, other members include Toni Carbo Bearman of NCLIS, Joseph Caponio of the National Technical Information Service, Martin Cummings of the National Library of Medicine, Joseph Howard of the Library of Congress, and Robert Warner, United States Archivist:

This group of experts made the following recommendations: "that NAL be strengthened in order to serve as the Nation's chief information resources for agricultural and allied sciences. These include food, nutrition, renewable natural resources, forestry, physical and social sciences, agriculture, home economics, rural community welfare and development, youth development, domestic and export marketing, and energy.

The National Agricultural Library should coordinate a national network of public and private agricultural libraries and information centers, including land grant and state colleges and universities and other public and private organizations.

In the reports' collective summary, the panel lists 18 specific recommendations, including:

- increase the NAL staff by 50 positions.

- obtain supplemental funds of some \$3 million over a two-year period.

- obtain additional resources to develop a national information network and improve the use of NAL technology.

- increase the user fees as service improves.

- strengthen the collection with more specialized subject and foreign materials.

- extend hours of service.

- improve the AGRICOLA data base and provide a thesaurus."

American Libraries, November 1982.
page 612

PLA Goes Country

The Public Library Association, a division of the American Library Association, is presenting its first national conference for public librarians, trustees, educators, library school students, and friends of public libraries. One of the Conference Highlights is a day long program entitled Rural Libraries: Coming Out of the Country. Topics to be discussed include "Library Services to Older Americans: Marketing Rural Libraries, NCLIS and Rural Library Services, and "Rural Libraries and the Humanities."

Speakers for the program are Henry Drennan, Joseph Gruenwald, John Head, Bernard Vavrek, Toni Carbo Bearman, Daniel Suvak, Kristin Woolever, and John Houlahan.

Bernard Vavrek of the Center for the Study of Rural Librarianship at Clarion (Penn) College is in charge of the day's activities, which will be held Thursday, March 24, 1983 at the Baltimore Convention Center, Baltimore, Maryland from 9:00 A.M. through 5:00 P.M.

ETC...

QUESTION: I seek information on planning and coordinating collection development for a multi-county public library system including a central library, a headquarters collection, and many autonomous, mostly small, rural libraries. We particularly need ideas on how to determine which kinds of purchases to coordinate and who would buy what. The subject approach doesn't work for us. Judith L. Levine, Adult Services Consultant, Mid-York Library system, 1600 Lincoln Ave., Utica, N.Y. 13502.

Please send replies to Action Exchange
50 East Huron Street
Chicago, Illinois 60611

American Libraries, October 1982

BANKRUPTCY OPTIONS

The Center has received more and more inquiries about reorganizing farm finances through federal bankruptcy laws. Prior to 1978, bankruptcy options were limited to liquidation of farm assets, distribution of proceeds to creditors, and typically the end of the farm business. Since 1978 it has been possible to use bankruptcy laws to reorganize a farm's finance and pay creditors out of future earnings.

The Center was fortunate to find a Minnesota attorney, Barbara Johnson, who is now investigating how reorganization bankruptcies can apply to family-size farms. Anyone with experience or information about farm bankruptcies should contact Gene Severens at the Center for Rural Affairs, P. O. Box 405, Walthill, Nebraska 68067.

RURAL RESOURCES

The Small Farm Energy Project Training Institute sponsored by the Center is available to provide outreach assistance to organizations and agencies working in rural America. Institute staff have extensive experience in appropriate alternate energy

technology and community-based organizing. Services can be arranged to fit the demands of the client group in the form of seminars, workshops, and consultation. A wide variety of resource material is also available including the Small Farm Energy Primer and the Rural Energy Skills Manual, a guided approach to community organizing strategies and energy skills development. For more information on how the Training Institute can assist your organization or community, contact Rob Aiken at (402) 254-6893 or Joe Lesiek at (402) 846-5428.

HELP!!!!!!

Terry L. Weech, a member of the Rural Library Services committee (ALA/PLA/SMLS), is compiling a list of people involved in research relating to rural library service. If you have been involved with research on rural library service, please send your name and information on your research to Terry. If you are planning a research project or have been involved in programs or activities promoting rural library service, he would also like to hear from you. A list of "Rural Library Service Advocates" is also being considered. Please send your name and activities to Terry L. Weech, University of Illinois, 410 David Kinley Hall, 1407 W. Gregory Drive, Urbana, Illinois 61801.

MORE HELP!!!!!!

We are looking for information on research on the information needs of farmers and agricultural communities. Unpublished reports or studies are especially needed. Please forward information to Paul Deane, Orangeburg County Public Library, P. O. Box 1367, Orangeburg, South Carolina 29115.

SURVEY SHOWS GRASS ROOTS SUPPORT FOR A GRASS ROOTS LIBRARY: Robert Audretsch, Director of the Three Rivers Regional Library Service System, HQ'd in New Castle, Colorado reports on a library serving a population of 2400. He found in a survey that 43% of the population are library users and 87% express willingness to help with the library construction drive--which is well along toward its goal of a \$284,000 building. Circulation of their 7,448 books by one FTE and volunteers is up to 17,502

for 1981, having climbed from 6,497 in 1977. One possible reason: 95% of respondents approve of the library hours.

Adapted from LJ/SLJ Hotline, 10/18/82.

PROFILE OF THE RURAL LIBRARY, USA:

Bernard Vavrek, head of Clarion State College's Center for the Study of Rural Librarianship, sends along the results of a national survey of rural libraries. The quintessential library emerges from the statistics is to be found in a town of 1,255 people, but serving 4690 in the hinterlands. It is 53 miles away from a city of 25,000 or more and some of its patrons travel 12 miles for service. It has an annual budget of \$28,000, three salaried employees and volunteers making up 25% of the staff. There is only a one in 10 chance of finding an MLS in this library and only a 50-50 chance of finding a photocopier. Access to electronic data bases is just about nonexistent, but--surprisingly--4 out of 10 are connected to the OCLC system. This is the public library that something like 50% of the US population must rely on.

LJ/SLJ HOTLINE, 9/13/82.

LIBRARY SCHOOL IN CLARION SHINES

The November 1982 issue of RE (Rural Electrification) featured the Center for the Study of Rural Librarianship in Clarion, Penn. RE called Clarion the underfunded, understaffed "Hidden Giant" that is trying to bring the public attention to the plight and potential of rural libraries. The cover story for the issue was a report on "Rural Education: the one-room school still work". RE is a national publication (25,000 circulations) sent to all managers, officers, and directors of all rural electric co-operatives, public power and public utility districts in the United States.

CENTER CONSIDERING RURAL INSTITUTE

The Center is considering offering a Rural Institute for students of all kinds interested in contemporary agricultural issues. The Institute would be held once or twice a year in Walthill for about three weeks, and would be designed to help participants (students and faculty) understand some of the underlying economic and environmental dilemmas in American agriculture, and to analyze those issues from a social justice perspective. Special seminars will also be arranged for those interested in acquiring advocacy skills, especially in tax and credit issues. Board and staff members as well as guest faculty will lead the Institute. The program is expected to appeal to farm activists, students in conventional agricultural studies programs, and rural clergy and seminarians preparing for rural ministry. The Institute will be self-supporting and will offer college credit by arrangement, if the student desires. People interested in knowing more about the prospective Rural Institute should write or call the center.

Center for Rural Affairs Newsletter
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Editor: John M. Houlahan

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