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Rhode Island Library Hssociation Bulletin

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A Town-Wide Survey Methods & Motives

BY JOAN SCHAEFER

In January the Barrington Public Library conducted its first ever town-wide survey. We are in the process of writing a new Five-Year Plan for the years 1993-1998 and decided that it would be a helpful way to focus the planning committee on specific goals and objectives.

With the encouragement of the Department of State Library Services we have for many years, but particularly for the past five years, kept statistics on just about everything that goes on in the Library, and have measured everything measurable. In addition, during the past five years the Barrington Library has conducted two in-house surveys – one on "output measurements", and another, a week-long survey to find out how many people use the Library each day and where they come from. (It turned out that one-third of them come from out of town.)

But one of the things you can't find out from statistics and from in-house surveys is why the people who don't use the Library don't use the Library. And you can't find out much about services you've never offered. We particularly wanted to know if Sunday hours were desired and whether the residents would be willing to pay for them. We wanted to reach every household in town, users and non-users alike. At the same time, we wanted to reach the student population because their needs are frequently different from those of adults. And we wanted to do it as cheaply and as quickly as possible.

If you have never conducted a survey of this kind, you might find this description of our procedures helpful.

To do a survey what do you have to do? You have to develop it, get it printed, pay for it, distribute it, get it returned and compute and analyze the results. These are the steps we took:

- 1. In early November, I called Frank Iacono, Reference and Information Services Librarian at DSLS calling Frank is the first step to most every project I undertake in my Library! He sent me several sample surveys with good ideas in them. Our Department Heads and I developed a survey for our particular needs in a couple of brainstorming sessions. I took the survey to our Five-Year Planning Committee and to the November Board of Trustees Meeting. Both groups made a few excellent suggestions, and the Trustees offered to pay for the printing.
- 2. With the printing costs taken care of, we still could not afford the mailing costs to 5,600 homes. Even at bulk rate it would have been prohibitive. So, I called the Town Manager and told him we wanted to distribute a survey to every Barrington home but couldn't afford to mail it. I asked if we could insert a survey into the town calendar and annual report which is delivered to every home by mail the last week in December. He said that would be all right with him, but that we would have to stuff and staple the surveys into each of the 5,600 calendars. He mentioned in passing that the Public Works Department also had an insert for the calendar this year.
- So, I promptly called the Director of Public Works. I suggested to him that the Library would

stuff and staple half of their inserts, if they would stuff and staple half of ours. (Well, we ended up doing about 75% of the stuffing, but they brought the calendars to us, and then hauled them all to the Post Office.)

- 4. Because we were particularly interested in receiving student input, I next called the Superintendent of Schools and asked if he would be willing to have the surveys distributed to all students in grades 5 through 12. While I envisioned thousands of paper airplanes filling the sky outside the schools, he stunned me by saying he would not only have them distributed, but would ask the teachers to have the students fill them out in the classroom. The local parochial school and two private schools in town offered to do the same.
- 5. My resourceful secretary found a price-war going on among the local printers, so we were able to order 8,000 surveys in two different colors (white for households, blue for students) for \$283, and they were delivered in a week. We placed an article in *The Barrington Times* alerting the residents to the survey, and explaining what it was for.
- 6. The Friends of the Library were a most important contact in the enterprise. I should mention that the Town Manager called to let me know when the calendars would be ready for us December 22. At the Friends of the Library Board Meeting on December 7, I sheepishly asked if any members would consider giving us a couple of hours to stuff surveys three days before Christmas. Bless our Friends! Eight of them came on the 22nd in fact 10 did, but by the time the last two arrived, we had completed the job. The Friends were augmented by seven staff members, off and on. We all developed some secondary form of carpal tunnel syndrome together that day wielding staplers.

One other thing we did that proved to be beneficial. We expected the residents to get the surveys back to us somehow, and it occurred to one of our staff members that those folks who never use the Library might not make the effort to come there just to return a survey. So I called the managers of Almacs supermarket, the Center Market and the West Barrington Soda Fountain and asked if we could use their stores as drop-off points. We placed drop-off boxes in all three locations and one in the Town Hall, too. More than 100 of our surveys were returned in those boxes.

So much for the mechanics of surveying. Here are some of the results. Keeping in mind that experts consider a 5% return a success, we were pleased that of the

5,600 surveys sent out in the town calendar 450, or 8%, were returned. Of the 1,650 sent to the schools 655, or 40%, were returned. As it turned out, our hope that those people who don't use the Library would fill out the surveys proved to be disappointing. We had no responses from Adult residents who had never visited the Library and only four people who indicated that their last visit was more than two years ago.

We did not use separate survey questions for adults and students – another time I think we would – but we kept the responses separate. In a number of instances the responses from the two groups differed markedly. For example, students overwhelmingly prefer paperback books, adults prefer hardbound. Adults want to find more bestsellers and videotapes in the Library, while students want more text books and computers and typewriters for use. While both groups put reading for pleasure as a major reason for coming to the Library, adults also put as primary reasons, attending programs, bringing their children, and seeking consumer information. Students top their list with class and course reading and reports, and keeping up on education topics.

What's the payoff for doing a survey? What did we learn, and what will we do about it? Many of the survey results confirmed what we already knew or anticipated from observation or experience, but they pointed up, too, a number of areas where changes need to be made and services need to be strengthened. They also provided documentation which we can use before the Town Appropriations Committee.

We learned that Barrington residents want the Library to be open on Sundays. 53% of adults responding not only want Sunday hours, but are willing to pay \$8.00 more in taxes per household for them. A slightly smaller percentage of students want Sunday hours, but a full two-thirds generously offered their parents taxes to pay for them! One even wrote a note saying, "My parents would be glad to pay it." Sunday hours have been included in our new Five-Year Plan and, encouraged by the information from the surveys, I have written a supplemental budget request for the inclusion of funding for Sunday hours in the 1993-94 budget.

The students' most common request in the survey was for more Library staff and more assistance when they use the Library for assignments. When our Regional Center was discontinued last year, Interlibrary Loan and Federal Documents functions were added to the Reference Department's responsibilities, without additional staffing. We know we are shorthanded, and the survey results bore that out. An additional full time staff member has been

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requested for the Reference Department next year, and the Five-Year Plan includes two additional full time staff members (or FTE) in the public service departments by 1998.

The Adult patrons' greatest concern expressed in the survey was for a better reference collection and more up-to-date non-fiction. Our Five-Year Plan seeks a 10% increase in the book budget each year for the next 5 years.

Young students requested more services for teenagers. One asked for "a section for kids age 9 to 12," others for "more programs and more information for teens." We have a fledgling Young Adult program that the survey points out sorely needs to be expanded. Our new goals and objectives include an expanded Young Adult department and I have requested that the Town Council reclassify the position of our part-time Young Adult Librarian to full department head status, with pay to match.

These are the major innovations we will institute during the coming year as a result of the survey. Some survey suggestions we could take care of right away, like "Would you please put more chairs in the stacks." We did!

And not the least return was the positive reinforcement which we received from the survey responses. To the question, "Do you think the library is worth your tax dollar?" we could find only one "No" in the whole lot. We had a few gripes about "noise," "copies too expensive," or "not enough smiles," but for the most part the responses were positive. On days when I feel gloomy, I head for the survey box and wallow in survey question #14: "What I like most about the Barrington Public Library is:

"Friendly atmosphere, excellent service"
"The Children's room – wonderful, great

librarians."

"Reference assistants are knowledgeable and helpful."

"The artistic displays, the programs, the animals."

"Everyone in my family feels comfortable using the Library."

"Keep up the good work."

"It seems near perfect to me!"

People love libraries, and a survey is one delightful way to find that out, too.

Joan Schaefer is the director of the Barrington Public Library.

RILA Executive Board and "The Umbrella Resolution"

The following account, written by Judith Paster (RILA Past President) is based on personal notes, the notes of RILA secretary, Debbie Mongeau, a DSLS information sheet, and a memorandum written by Ken Svengalis (State Law Librarian). The Executive Board's discussion of this issue was a heated one, and the vote to support H7114 was close. Clearly discussion and debate needs to continue, and the RILA Executive Board Committee welcomes opinions and thoughts on this crucial issue.

At its meeting on April 6, RILA's Executive Board devoted considerable time to examining the so-called "Umbrella Resolution," H93-7114. Introduced on February 24, the bill consolidates the State Library, the State Archives, the State Documents Clearinghouse, and the State Law Library under the aegis of the Department of State Library Services. [An information sheet, produced by DSLS and containing a more detailed explanation of the Umbrella Resolution, follows this account.]

Guests of the Board were Ken Svengalis, State Law Librarian, Tom Evans of the State Library and Tim Slavin, State Archivist, all of whom gave their positions on the bill and what it would mean to their respective services.

All three of the speakers seemed to feel that there had been little or no preparation for the introduction of the bill. Moreover, each felt that the purpose of their libraries, as well as the public served, were vastly different from those represented by the State Department of Library Services.

Speaking from his position as State Law Librarian, Ken Svengalis expressed the view that the State Law Library is much more involved with the legal needs of the Rhode Island, New England, and national legal communities than with the functions of DSLS, and the public libraries which it largely serves.

Furthermore, the State Law Library, part of the judicial branch of the government since 1868, is "statutorily charged" with serving the Supreme Court, its justices, the trial courts and branch libraries. However, the Law Library "routinely" takes referrals from public and academic libraries in the state.

Ken did call the Board's attention to Rhode Island General Laws 42-85-1,2,3 and 4, which specify a "coordinating council for state library, archival, and information services." Set up by law in 1982, this council consists of the director of DSLS, as well as

the state librarian, the state archivist, and the state law librarian. Also various representatives of all library associations serve as advisors to the council. Ken suggested that this council had been permitted to disintegrate in preceding years, but could be resurrected as a forum to discuss those information purposes all services hold in common.

Tom Evans of the State House Library serves under the Secretary of State and allied legislative bodies. The library is located in the State House, and moving it elsewhere would create tremendous problems. Furthermore the Library has tremendous problems moving itself into the present day technically. Its computer system is already out-dated at eleven years of age, and much historical material exists on hand-written three by five cards. In spite of that, the library receives 150 reference questions per day. Rhode Island, with a part-time assembly that works on a full-time schedule, ranks 4th in the country in terms of bills generated.

In general, Tom felt that moving to DSLS would not improve the already existing problems at the State House, nor would its services be improved by such a move. Better would be the passage of H93-5322 which provides for the modernization of systems at the State House, and provides for full text of bills on-line.

Tim Slavin, State Archivist since 1989, reminded the Board that the concept of a central structure that would house a number of library-related functions has been a focal idea in the Rhode Island library community for years, beginning with the Humphrey report in 1963.

Tim, who identifies himself as an "archivist" and not as a "librarian" feels that the Archives have to do with the total life span of a piece of information, which implies that the archivist must preserve information as well as provide access to it. Tim also announced that 1600 requests were answered by the Archives last year, up 4000% from two years ago.

Tim's view was that though a central management forum such as the Information Management Centers of other states, might improve access, creating a "super-agency" out of DSLS would make the various libraries compete for funding and public libraries would stand to suffer.

Barbara Weaver, Director of DSLS, expressed the raison d'etre of the Umbrella Resolution, which is to assure public right of access to information, available only through the State Library, the State Law Library and the State Archives. Barbara sees these agencies as fulfilling their own objectives, with a central agency committed to insuring the availability of the products of those objectives to the public at large.

The issue of whether these libraries remain as they are, under varying governance, or whether they become part of a single governing entity that would enable them to fulfill their own charges and yet also become accessible to library patrons throughout the state is a crucial one for those of us involved in libraries in Rhode Island.

House Bill 93-H7114 or "The Umbrella Resolution"

A DSLS Information Sheet

WHAT DOES IT DO?

House Bill 93-H7114 consolidates several library and information-related functions in state government under the Department of State Library Services. These functions are now scattered among the Department, the State Library, the State Archives, the State Documents Clearinghouse, and the State Law Library.

WHO WILL BENEFIT FROM IT?

Everyone in Rhode Island. This is the "Information Age." Access to government information is becoming increasingly important as we approach the 21st century. We need a strong statelevel agency to speak for Rhode Island's library and information providers and users. The existing agencies are too small to have significant impact on state information policy.

By consolidating the separate agencies, there will also be significant public relations benefits to state government. The mission of the State Library is to serve the Legislature; the mission of the Law Library is to serve the Courts: the mission of the Archives is to maintain and preserve the public record; the mission of the Department of State Library Services is to assure public access to information. A combined agency can accomplish all these aims, resulting in increased public satisfaction with state government performance.

WHO WANTS IT?

This bill puts into effect the top priority recommendation from the 1991 Governor's Conference on Library and Information Services. It has been endorsed by the Library Board of Rhode Island, the Coalition of Library Advocates, and other statewide library groups and individuals.

As long ago as 1963, the author of a major library study in Rhode Island bemoaned the lack of coordi-

nation among state-level providers of library services. This concern has been echoed many times over the years: at Governor's conferences in 1979 and 1991, and in a 1988 study by the Peat Marwick firm.

WHYDO IT?

Many areas of state government services can be reorganized to operate more efficiently and more effectively. Library/information services are particularly susceptible to improvement in this way. In 41 of 50 states, a combined agency is directly responsible for two or more of these functions. How can Rhode Island, especially given its small size, continue a less effective approach?

This change in agency functions will follow the model successfully used in consolidating the substance abuse functions formerly scattered throughout various state agencies. It will also be consistent with the model being developed for "one-stop shopping" for family health care services.

WHY DO IT NOW?

Thirty years seems long enough. The current economic situation demands reforms in the way state government operates. Information technology is rapidly changing the way that library/information agencies deliver information to their clients. This technology can be more effectively used with coordinated efforts to provide access and training as well as to prepare agencies to make effective use of information technology in meeting their organizational goals.

Rhode Island residents are complaining about the cost and complexity of state government. They are confused about which of the various state library agencies can do what for them. The Department often receives phone calls from people who should have been sent to other libraries. A single agency can provide a unified response, and the coordinated leadership necessary to move things forward.

WHY SHOULD THE DEPARTMENT OF STATE LIBRARY SERVICES BE THE UMBRELLA AGENCY?

The Department is already responsible in law for coordinating the statewide library network, and for overseeing the development of libraries that serve the public throughout the state. The Department is a Cabinet-level agency, whose Director reports to the Governor. She has regular official contact with other Cabinet officers, and is in a position to affect state policy decisions.

By law the Director of the Department must be a professional librarian with a Master's Degree in Library Science. During the Department's 29-year history, Directors have never been political appointees, and have served under a number of different Governors, often from different political parties.

The Department has a consistent reputation for non-partisan provision of advice, assistance, and information. Users of state government services need to be sure that the information they receive is nonpartisan and unbiased.

The Department has taken a leadership role in bringing to the state's attention the need for a coordinated approach to all aspects of information delivery: from generation of documents through dissemination, storage, retrieval, and preservation. Information delivery is on a continuum. It can best be handled through a state-level agency that coordinates all of its varied aspects.

WHAT WILL IT COST?

We don't anticipate any additional costs to be incurred as a result of the transfer.

WILL IT SAVE MONEY?

Yes. Over the long run, we expect economies to occur in the areas of combined contracts for electronic database access and purchase of library materials. We also expect to reap some advantages in staff flexibility, in that a larger group of staff members can be assigned as needed when a heavy workload occurs in a particular area, such as the processing of legislative bills.

We must point out that, rather than looking for cost savings, we are looking for more effective service delivery capability at the state level. All library/information service agencies have been hard hit by the current economic situation, and we are doing the most we can under trying circumstances.

An additional area for the provision of services in a cost-effective manner lies in citizen access to state government information. The Department of State Library Services is already engaged in several innovative approaches regarding electronic "publication" as well as access to information. A unified approach to the problems inherent in providing access to state government information will lead to quicker solutions that meet the needs of Rhode Islanders in a cost-effective manner.

BULLETIN BOARD

The Rhode Island Department of State Library Services has contracted with the East Providence Public Library for the provision of the large print book services it has been providing for many years, which include mail service to homebound patrons of the Regional Library for the Blind and Physically Handicapped, interlibrary loan to RHILINET libraries, and rotating public library deposit collections. The large print collection at DSLS will be transferred to East Providence in July and is to be merged with East Providence's collection at its Fuller Branch, a newly renovated, handicapped-accessible facility. Eligible homebound patrons will continue to receive books by mail after certification by the RI Regional Library for the Blind and Physically Handicapped. The Regional Library will also continue to fund new book purchases. In addition to these specialized services, all CLAN library card holders will continue to have the collection at their disposal.

ententates.

The ADA Assembly, a new group of representatives from all the American Library Association divisions that met for the first time at ALA Mid-Winter, 1993, is collecting information on how libraries are working on ADA issues. Send any information or materials you would like to share to Kathleen Mayo, ADA Assembly Chairperson, Lee County Public Library, 2050 Lee St., Fort Myers, FL, FAX (813) 334-4369. The Assembly will hold open forums at ALA conferences – look for them on the ALA conference schedule.

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Two STORYTOURS will be offered this summer. Both include motorcoach tours to literary sites and authors' visits. Academic credit is optional.

Celtic Connections: A Storytour of Children's and Young Adult Literature in Ireland will be held July 1-15. Visits will connect today's Irish literature of the past. The itinerary includes Dublin, Kilkenny, Waterford, Cork, Killarney, Limerick, and Galway. Storytelling and folk theatre events will add to the literary lore. The Irish countryside and sites of historical significance will be backdrop to the literary adventure in this country known through song, story, and poetry.

Reading in the Rockies: A Storytour of Children's and Young Adult Literature in Montana and Wyoming will be offered August 2-14 beginning

in Billings, Montana. Participants will explore Yellowstone and the spectacular Grand Tetons, listen to storytellers and authors of the West and of Native American lore, and learn about western children's literature from a Wyoming literary specialist. This tour offers a combination of breathtaking natural beauty, American history, and stories that share the excitement of times past and present.

For information on both literature tours contact Dr. Mary Lou White, Book Adventures, Inc., 1402 Glen View Road, Yellow Springs, Ohio 45387.

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On April 19th URI Libraries celebrated acquisitions of their one millionth volume.

PEOPLE

CATHY MELLO ALVES recently was appointed Reference Librarian at the RI State Library.

NANCY CAMPBELL is a newly-appointed Information Services Librarian at the Cranston Public Library.

BETH HOLMES is now Technical Services Librarian at the RI State Library.

REGAN ROBERTSON is the new Director of the Westerly Public Library starting on May 17. She most recently was a consultant to the Washington State Library and the University of Washington Graduate School of Library and Information Science.

CALENDAR

May 24: Library Board of RI, Cross' Mills PL, 4-6 p.m.

June 1: RILA Executive Board, Brown University Sciences Library, 2 p.m.

June 10-11: RILA Annual Conference, Salve Regina College, Newport

June 10-13: North American Serials Interest Group 8th Annual Conference, Brown University.

June 24-July 1: ALA Annual Conference, New Orleans

RHODE ISLAND LIBRARY ASSOCIATION SPRING CONFERENCE

June 10th and 11th Salve Regina University - Newport

Featured speaker: John Berry III

Editor-in-Chief, Library Journal

Mr. Berry, a graduate of Simmons GLS and editor of *Library Journal* since 1969, will be RILA's guest and featured speaker at the Thursday evening buffet dinner at Ochre Court.

The Conference will also offer a variety of workshops and seminars including:

- Librarians and Support Staff: We All Make it Happen! -
- View on Interviewing From Both Sides of the Desk -
 - Taming the Monsters Storytelling for Pre-teens -
- The Best and the Brightest Recruiting for the Library Profession of the Future -
 - Getting a Head Start Together -
- One for the Money, Two for the Show a Step-by-Step Guide to Adult Programming -
 - Damned in the USA showing of NEA-funded film on censorship of the arts -

A complete list of conference happenings along with registration forms are even now winging their way to the RILA membership. If, for whatever reason, you do not receive a form, or you have any questions or need additional information, call Karen McGrath (Auburn Branch 781-6116) or Brian Walsh (Pawtucket Public Library 725-3714).

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