

**A NEW BUSINESS MODEL TO HELP LIBRARIES**  
by Ventura County Supervisor Linda Parks, April 2011

County libraries are facing severe financial constraints in revenue and as a result there is less cooperation county-wide from library systems. For example, Camarillo has privatized its library, Moorpark pulled out of the County's system, Ventura had to close Wright Library, and Thousand Oaks is considering an option to charge all non-residents a fee which would require the City to first pull out of the Southern California Library Cooperative and forego delivery of library materials between their library and other libraries in California. Additionally, the Ventura County Library Commission of city representatives has recommended their Commission be dissolved.

In light of the tough fiscal times and potential reduced access and service that could come from decentralization of libraries, it would be beneficial to consider new business models where libraries broaden their scope to become community resource centers for a multitude of services, and where new revenue sources can be tapped.

Any new business model should be based on the goal that our libraries remain free and accessible, including branches and hours of availability, and that the public maintains its ability to access books and other resources. In order to reach these goals we can leverage resources to not just keep libraries open, but to help them become a growing enterprise and a greater community resource for all ages.

Libraries can offer much more than just books, they can be regional resources for information, classes, services, and programs. For example, libraries can promote safety and preparedness in the community by offering emergency kits and flu shots. Libraries can provide public outreach for programs of other agencies, such as electric lawnmower rebates organized by the Air Pollution Control District, transit passes through the cities and Transportation Commission, and a compost bin giveaway program provided by trash haulers and the County. Some libraries, including Oxnard offer passports and one library system in the State offers weddings. Increasing the resources offered at libraries will help libraries appeal to a broader population.

Partnerships can expand regional resources as well as revenue sources. We can look towards more partnering with schools for classes, or with other libraries such as medical and law libraries. The Oak Park Library is an example of having a county library on a school campus. Working with libraries throughout the county can benefit the region. For example, our County collaborated with the Oxnard Library, which is not in the County's system, to enable grant funding. More grant opportunities are out there for similar collaborative efforts. New revenue can also be found by partnering with businesses in the area, such as leasing space in libraries to complimentary uses such as a coffee house, or naming reading rooms after corporate sponsors. We should also look at business models that have profitable ventures, such as Amazon Books with their online books and books on tape.

With the fiscal future not looking bright, I will be requesting that my Board of Supervisors authorize our staff to study new opportunities for revenue and service to help ensure our libraries endure through these rough times.