

## County Libraries Phase II

### REASON FOR INVESTIGATION

The ongoing concerns of County officials, both elected and appointed, and the citizens of Ventura County for the uncertain future of our libraries were responsible for this study.

Phase I of the report on County Libraries was released on February 1, 1996 and addressed the issue of funding. Phase II is taking a broader view.

### BACKGROUND

Many citizens have expressed the need for a library plan to be implemented quickly.

The Ventura County Library Services Agency, founded in 1916, includes the Historical Museum Library in Ventura and fifteen branch libraries:

Avenue in Ventura, Camarillo, Fillmore, E.P. Foster, Ventura, Meiners Oaks, Moorpark, Oak Park, Oakview, Ojai, Piru, Ray D. Prueter, Pt. Hueneme, Saticoy, Simi Valley, Soliz-El Rio, and H.P. Wright in Ventura. The independent libraries include Blanchard in Santa Paula, the City of Oxnard and the City of Thousand Oaks.

### PROCEDURES FOLLOWED

- Conferred with County Supervisors, Chief Administrative Officer, members of his staff and the Director of Library Services Agency.
- Visited libraries throughout Ventura County including independent community supported facilities and interviewed personnel at branch libraries.
- Attended the Citizens for Libraries Workshop on February 2, 1996.

### FINDINGS

- The March 1996 ballot measures to raise funds for libraries through property taxes passed in Ojai and in the unincorporated area near Ojai, but failed in Ventura, Camarillo and in unincorporated areas near Ventura and Camarillo.
- County Library Services received \$100,000 from the general fund for extra library hours until June 1996. Some City Councils have contributed funds to increase hours in their local libraries.
- Comments voiced by employees of branch libraries include the following:
  - Book, reference collections and current periodicals are seriously deficient.
  - There is little communication among libraries.
  - There is a need to share information and receive input from people in the field.
  - There is a need to restructure management. It is administratively top heavy.
  - Library users are confused with inconsistent hours of operation.
  - Purchased books are not being processed in a timely manner, resulting in long

periods before they are ready to be loaned out.

- Technology should eliminate need for many centralized activities.
  - The position of Reference Librarian is now essentially designed to serve only one area.
  - Librarians need to be flexible and should not be restricted by traditional job descriptions.
  - The small neighborhood library is struggling to survive
  - Funds are lacking for special programs.
  - A library should be welcoming and comfortable with a relaxed atmosphere in order to attract library users.
- One staff serves both Wright and Foster libraries on an itinerant basis. An ergonomics study was done because the increased workload was being blamed for job related injuries as well as lowered morale.
  - Centralized cataloging data base is generally adequate at all libraries regardless of size. Although access to the Internet is available, there is concern that it is not organized well for public library purposes. As stated in Phase I report, the State Library Networking Task Force has developed a statewide resource sharing pool. This plan calls for a technological California multitype library network which will be composed of five Regional Library Networks that will link all types of libraries in a given geographic region. This statewide network will link libraries in communities, organizations, educational institutions, the medical field and businesses in order to provide state-of-the-art reference, economic, research, educational and cultural information to all participating libraries who contract with this resource sharing pool. This plan will offer collectively a wide variety of resource materials which is more cost-effective than any one of the libraries could provide individually. Legislation governing this coordinated cooperative statewide plan will be written in 1996 and the phase-in will begin.
  - The small libraries serve as community centers, homework centers and tend to have higher juvenile than adult circulation. The needs include material to help with homework, job and career choices and special programs.
  - The hours that County libraries are open are determined by County Library Services administration. Some cities have contributed funds to increase hours, but these funds are temporary.
  - The "Used Book Store" concept appears to make a profit when located in medium and large libraries, but is not profitable in small libraries.
  - County Supervisor Frank Schillo has presented to Ventura County Cities and other groups the concept of a "federation" of libraries. Joint powers agreements can provide for such things as shared administrative and support costs, reduced book and materials purchasing costs, access to other libraries and coordinated funding strategies. Joint powers agreement library models include Santa Clara and Sonoma Counties.
  - On May 7th, 1996, the Ventura County Board of Supervisors approved Supervisor Schillo's concept of the County entering into a Joint Powers Agreement with cities to

operate County libraries. The Joint Powers Agreement would include independent library/cities if they choose. The Board also approved the concept of initiating a benefit assessment district with an advisory vote to be on the ballot November 1996, as well as seeking consultant services which will cost between \$50,000. and \$100,000.

- On May 7th, 1996, the Library Services Agency presented the Board of Supervisors a proposed management reorganization and down sizing plan which would eliminate three managerial positions by attrition. This organization includes 42 total administrative and support services positions and 41 total positions at the branch libraries.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The 1995/96 Grand Jury recommends:

1. The Wright and Foster Libraries should be combined at a large centralized location with access to public transportation
2. The California State Multi Library Network plan for providing state-of-the-art informational resource sharing should be a high priority to library management.
3. Staff training in technology systems and available resources should be ongoing.
4. Due to proposed library management reorganization and down sizing, the Library Services Agency should evaluate and justify all existing job classifications. Revise the Reference Librarian job description so that it will be more flexible. An experienced library assistant might serve the Reference Desk.
5. Libraries should continue to promote special programs which increase patronage such as: ESL and literacy tutors, children's reading programs, story telling, adult discussion groups and homework assistance. Schools should be encouraged to cooperate in this endeavor.
6. Large libraries should explore the possibility of supporting a used book store, a gift shop, musical concerts, coffee shop and film evenings.
7. The libraries should provide classes for patrons in the use of computers to access information. This will serve to free limited library staffs.
8. A written roundtable for County library staff would allow for an efficient means of sharing suggestions and creative ideas among libraries.
9. Each library should have an attractive box available for contributions in a centralized location. Individual groups may wish to provide matching funds.
10. Review possibility of charging fees for other than basic services. For example: out of city patrons, use of computers and electric typewriters.
11. The consultant should be hired to assist in developing the Library Federation Plan as soon as possible.
12. The management of the library should review its central library support operation with the goal of streamlining operations and cutting unnecessary costs. Some goals can be achieved by delegating routine functions like book ordering to the individual libraries while at the same time giving the libraries computer based tools to simplify their work.

13. Library management should hire a consultant or engage Information System Department personnel to analyze its operations and explore the great potential of technology for reducing labor intensive work of professional librarians and at the same time increase the information sources offered to the public beyond the hard cover books. It is the duty of the library system to be the store front where the public can access the vast treasure of information which is stored on computer files (also called data bases) throughout the world. These vast warehouses of information are accessible through computers from commercial and public sources like the Internet.
14. Small neighborhood libraries should remain open since they play a vital and necessary role for all local citizens, especially the young, the elderly and the disadvantaged.

**RESPONSE REQUIRED**

Ventura County Library Services Agency

Board of Supervisors