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Singin' the Library Blues

Tim York

La Fayette-Walker County Library, tyork@chrl.org

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We Love LIBRARIES!

There's been a lot of gloom and doom spread about lately regarding public libraries. And I'm not denying any of it; these aren't the best of library times. Increased patronage but no extra funding. Possible closures. Budget cuts (i.e. do I buy copier paper or toilet paper?). To say the first three years of my library management career have been challenging would be a massive understatement.

But, you know, the average library user usually doesn't see any of the negatives just mentioned. What they see are open doors and smiling faces. They just keep coming to the library for their own unique, personal needs. Like the regulars who are there first thing every morning when the library opens to check their e-mails or surf the Internet for any possible job vacancies or just to play a quick game of solitaire. There's the weekly Ready to R.E.A.D. (Reach Emergent Academic Development) class that comes rain or shine to learn how to become prepared to enter school through songs, hands-on activities and social interaction. The newcomers to the community who instinctively come to the library to ask questions about where to get their lights turned on or where to go to look for work. Then there's the lady who comes in around 4:30 pm on Friday afternoons (we close at 5pm on Fridays), returns her 12 rented videotapes (yes, people still use VHS) from the week before and then selects 12 more for the upcoming week.

It's a little hectic but that's the best part of the job; helping those who come in with whatever their need may be. And to some of the general public, those needs may not be that important. But to those patrons who've had to disconnect their internet service or can't afford to go to the cinema for entertainment or can't afford to buy a new book (or who can but know the wisdom of free), the library is their special oasis; a place

where they can come and get what they need with no questions asked. And to speak to these people, laugh with these people, "pick" at these people (you know who I'm talking about, Sam) makes all the hassles and stresses that arise just a fast, fading memory.



By Tim York

It's also what makes all the financial mess so hard to take because not only will the library and its services be effected by funding cuts and rising expenditures but also all the people; the young, old, parents, children, home school, in school, out of school, employed, unemployed, under-employed. Where will they go? What will they do? How will they adjust/adapt? It's a ripple effect for our community that I'm afraid to think about. Our community needs an educated workforce but if the library's doors are closed due to a lack of funding where will the public go to tutor or job search or proctor test or _____(you fill in the blank)?

Only time will tell. Maybe funding will be restored. Maybe grants will be approved. Maybe stimulus money will be received. Maybe the public will realize that they have a responsibility and a say so in the matter to let their community leaders know that their library is an important and vital cog in the daily workings of the place they call home. One that can touch and influence the lives of every member of the community from cradle to grave. Isn't that why it's called a "public" library?

*Tim York is Manager at
LaFayette-Walker Public Library*