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Periodicals

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Are You Embedded?

By Dr. Norman J. Jacknis, NYSALB President

During the recent Iraq War, the term “embedded” got a new lease on life. Its re-use went quickly beyond the description of journalists who traveled with the American fighting forces in order to provide more valuable reports. Now, more generally, people refer to anything that is in the midst of the action as embedded.

While we know libraries are important in their communities, the question can certainly be asked: how **embedded** are they in their communities?

Given the importance of all members of the community realizing the full range of a library's activities, there are really two related sets of questions:

- Q1. Is your library: (a) somewhere “over there”, as just a “cultural ornament” or (b) essential in your community?
- Q2. Is your library perceived to be (a) somewhere “over there”, as just a “cultural ornament” or (b) essential in your community?

If your answer is not (b) to both questions, then maybe your library is not embedded enough in your community.

So how do you help your library become more embedded? Here are some examples of services to offer and to make known in order to make your library more embedded.

- Some libraries play an active role in the community's economic development, not just by being there, but also by helping the unemployed with job searches and resume writing and by helping smaller businesses with their research needs, whether that be industrial catalogs or leads for grants and global trade opportunities. One library established a section for specialized legal materials thus tying itself more closely with the local legal community.
- Libraries, with their high-speed access to the Internet and increasingly to wireless networks, can be the location for distance and other learning activities. This can bring in everyone from those who need literacy training or English-as-a-second-language to those with good educations already, who want continuing professional education. The fact that both groups see the library as a resource and see each other using the resource helps solidify the role of the library in the community.
- Some libraries are a backup to and have close tie-ins to other important institutions in the community, such as schools (for example, knowing about special assignments and preparing materials for students) and hospitals (for example, having them make known to their patients the availability of additional information at the library).

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Register Now!

The 2004


Trustee Institute April

30 - May 1, 2004

The Holiday Inn Turf

205 Wolf Road, Albany

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From The Desk Of Library Committee Chair

**Assemblywoman
Sandy Galef**

As spring approaches the corridors of the Capitol are filled with talk of the State Budget and what it will hold. Advocacy groups of every kind are flocking to the offices of their Assembly and Senate representatives to discuss their priorities. I thought that this would be an excellent opportunity to share some of my thoughts on the budget with you.

While this year's proposed budget cut for libraries of 5% is less severe than last year's 15% proposed cut, I am keenly aware that any reduction in funding would be devastating to most libraries and library systems. Years of flat funding and the Governor's consistent refusal to fully fund the statutory library aid formula have left the libraries of New York State financially disadvantaged and unable to absorb any loss. That is why restoration of the 5% cut to statewide library aid, restoration of the 15% cut to libraries in New York City, and a full funding of the library aid formula are at the top of my list of budget priorities. However, we can not continue to simply restore funding cuts to libraries, we need to move ahead and provide new funding to the library community. That is why I am also devoted to fighting for additional funding for library construction, school library systems, and the New York Online Virtual Electric Library (NOVEL).

Much of the budget debate this year is being driven by the need to address the Campaign for Fiscal Equity (CFE) decision. The Legislature must put forth a plan this year for how to implement the court's decision calling for adequate resources to meet our constitutional mandate to provide a "sound, basic education" for our state's students. In its decision, the Courts identified access to an adequate school library as one of the necessary resources. I believe that NOVEL and our school library systems are excellent, low cost ways that would allow for better sharing between schools and maximizing their available resources.

I hope that you will all continue to share your thoughts with me on the budget and the issues facing your libraries. You can reach me at my office in Albany at 518-455-5348. I look forward to working with you and making a positive difference for libraries.



From The Desk of Senator Hugh T. Farley

*Chairman of the Senate
Sub-committee on Libraries
(Special to NYSALB TRUSTEE)*

The Amazing Relevance of Libraries

With the confluence of Library Lobbying Day in mid-March, the State budget deadline of March 31st, and National Library Week in mid-April, I've been spending a lot of time talking with reporters who have been assigned to write "a library story."

Reporters and their editors are natural friends of libraries. They work with words all the time, they need timely and accurate research, and they appreciate both the art and the business of publishing.

So, I was taken aback when a reporter asked me, "Why are you putting so much effort into funding and maintaining libraries, when they are obsolete and irrelevant?" She added that, "everybody has a computer." Wow! The book is dead. And we don't even need a place to consult professionals about our business or recreational interests in other media. The first thing I blurted back was, "No, not everybody has a computer!" Although more than half of American homes do have a computer, this means that nearly half do not. So, even if everything worth knowing and doing is "on the web," nearly half the population still needs the free computers located in each public library in New York State. And the book is not dead! Book publishing is a multi-billion dollar business. While e-books are a developing medium, they are hardly ubiquitous. And, the place to borrow an e-book for free is – of course – the public library.

But libraries are far more than warehouses of books, computers, and other media. They are centers of community activity for young and old. And they are the place to find librarians.

Information finding has always been a cornerstone of, and a tremendous challenge for, electronic information systems. Search engines have taken giant leaps beyond Boolean algebra. But such interesting technologies as Abuzz search "communities of interest" – finding knowledgeable people, as well as database resources. The flexibility of, "with your interests, you'll like this new author," or, "be cautious with this research which is funded by a group with an ax to grind," elude machines, but are a foundation of librarianship.

Are libraries obsolete and irrelevant? Absolutely not! Our free public libraries remain at the core of civilized society. They are amazingly relevant today, and they are constantly expanding and reinventing their scope so as to remain relevant in whatever information society the future may bring.

Unholy Alliance

Dr. William Taber

In our time, public libraries in New York State and other states go through an annual craziness. Although public libraries provide a basic, fundamental function for civilized society, they still must scratch, scramble, plead, and advocate for enough money to stay alive for one more year. One of the legitimate arguments for funding that they advance is that public libraries help to equalize the discrepancies that exist among various classes and groups in our society in regard to access to intellectual and cultural resources, books, literature, information, etc. Public libraries have in fact a good record of bringing opportunity for such enrichment to poor people who otherwise could not afford it.

However, another facet of our functions was brought to mind by a recent article in the New York Times: "Schools, Facing Tight Budgets, Leave Gifted Programs Behind" by Diana Schemo, March 2, 2004. The title reveals the theme of the story, and the case examples are school districts which are "...struggling with shrinking revenues and new federal mandates that focus upon improving the test scores of the lowest achieving students."

How to deal with such a fiscal and political environment? For schools, according to an administrator, the formula is to "...satisfy federal and state requirements first...then do as much as we can for the majority and work on down." As a consequence, "...school districts across the country have turned to cutting programs for their most promising students." For example, in an Ozarks district almost exactly the population size of my library's village area in upstate New York, the "50 or so gifted children" have seen elimination of all the programs geared to their potentials.

Close to home, New York State has cut all the money that had previously supported programs for the "gifted," and districts are left to scramble for block grants if they wish. Programs for disabled children are mandated, but there is no political mandate to cultivate the "gifted," to develop their potential, and to ward off their frustrations. Political and educational authorities are ambivalent at best about such goals, even questioning their legitimacy. One principal is described in the article as maintaining "...that very bright children do not deserve (emphasis mine) specially tailored classes, especially when the district is focusing on bringing all children up to a minimum standard (emphasis mine) of competence.

Let's step back for a moment from looking at money and mandates. Glance up at the societal consequences of such choices as I've described.

First, there is a lesson about words. Currently, the unfortunate word, "gifted," carries a connotation of

special, unfair privilege as though it were like unearned wealth or political power that is given to a spoiled brat by his or her Daddy – all qualities that merit suspicion. In fact, inequalities of natural talent are not oppression; they are not at all "unfair" advantage to the few. The word, "gifted," when applied to the unusually talented, was intended to refer to a gift from God. That "gift," which can appear from any segment of society, deserved from the rest of us both respect and nurturing...and, from the individual in question, a sense of responsibility to use it productively.

Second, the world's geniuses, doctors, engineers, technicians, and other skilled professionals are increasingly produced in other countries, not here. You may have noticed that many of these talented people come here to work for us in what still remains the world's largest economy; as we consume the resources that the leaders, talents, and efforts of previous generations had built. Although our country seems to be at a peak of power projected around the world, its real strength in the long run can be undermined by weaknesses that it itself chooses to create. In addition to a suddenly huge national debt and deficits, worldwide distrusts, and disappearance of our manufacturing base, we can add as well the implications of failing to develop the talent of our own people. A country retains its economic, social, and

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President's Memo...

Continued from Cover

I'm sure trustees from across the state can add many other suggestions. Please contribute them to NYSALB's email discussion group at nysalb@www.watpa.org or talk about them at our annual Trustee Institute in May. (To join, send an email to join-nysalb@www.watpa.org.)

It's very important to be "embedded" in order to assure both proper service to your community as well as proper funding from the community. If you feel your library doesn't have the money to do all of this, don't fret. Start somewhere and perhaps your increased "embeddedness" in the community will help increase your revenue to do more. But you should surely know that, in these economic times, if your library is less entwined with and thus less useful to your community, it will suffer more.

Ultimately, this gets to the heart of a trustee's task. Aside from your fiduciary responsibilities and selection of a library director, there is no other function that is as significant as your "community relations job." A library trustee represents the library to its community and the community to the professional librarians who run day-to-day operations. The insights that are necessary to ensure that your library becomes more embedded in your community must come from you, the library trustee.

The 2004 Trustee Institute

Martina Thompson, NYSALB Trustee

Need funding? Tired of bad press? Is your board legal? These topics, plus views about library issues in a presidential election year, will be addressed during the 8th Annual Trustee Institute beginning April 30.

Join ALA President-elect Carol Brey-Casiano with your questions and concerns about federal legislation that affects your library. Ms. Brey-Casiano is highly qualified to address national library issues with work experience beginning as a Bookmobile Librarian for the Ozark Regional Library in rural Missouri. She subsequently worked in Oklahoma and Illinois before becoming the Director of the El Paso, Texas Public Library. Ms. Brey-Casiano has also served as an adjunct professor in library education programs on both sides of the border. An accomplished flutist, she frequently entertains audiences on the El Paso Public Television weekly show, "Stories and More @ Your Library", which she hosts.

Trustees with legal questions will want to join two experienced trustees, Attorney George Wolf and Supreme Court Judge David Krogmann for "Is Your Board Legal?" In addition to his private practice, Mr. Wolf served 26 years as a trustee of the Fairport Public Library, a school district public library. He is currently Vice-president of the Monroe County Library System Board of Trustees and their liaison to the Rochester Public Library Board. Judge Krogmann has served as a member and past President of the Board of Directors of the Crandall Public Library in Glens Falls, in addition to serving on the Southern Adirondack Library System Board of Directors. He is currently a member of the NYSALB Board of Directors.

A panel of three trustees will discuss how they secured reliable funding for their libraries. Ellen M. Bach, Esq., an attorney for Whiteman Osterman and Hanna LLP, will discuss the strategies used by the Albany Public Library Board to form a school district public library. Barbara Ullman's board at the Claverack Free Library decided to use Chapter 414. They faced tough opposition and won by a narrow margin. The Hyde Park Free Library Board formed a special library district. A trustee since 1976, John Bickford will explain why his board selected this option. Here is your opportunity to learn which tactics were successful and which pitfalls to avoid.

Following lunch, learn to establish and maintain relationships with your local media. Ron Kermani has a background as a newspaper investigative reporter and editor with 30 years of experience in the media and public relations professions. Mr. Kermani is Senior Vice-president for Corporate Communications for the New York State Higher Education Services Corporation, an adjunct professor at SUNY Albany and a consultant to the motion picture industry in Hollywood. His program, "Media Dating," will help you understand what information reporters need and how you can promote your library and its services.

The Annual Meeting of the NYSALB will be held as part of the Trustee Institute on Saturday, May 1, 2004, at the Holiday Inn Turf, 205 Wolf Road, Albany, New York.

"The Swan Song"

by Edwin M. Field,

former editor of TRUSTEE

According to www.wordorigins.org there is a legend that swans sing an exquisitely beautiful song before expiring. There's no truth to it but that's the legend and origin of the phrase. The phrase Swan Song dates back to 1831, although English language literary allusions to the legend date back to Chaucer c1374. In case you're not familiar with the "Swan Song" theme or concept, some dictionaries relate it to the final performance or effort, while others treat the words as a synonym and call the "Swan Song" "the last hurrah."

Well folks, unfortunately, this is my swan song. Thanks for the opportunity to serve as editor of NYSALB's newsletter TRUSTEE over these past years. Your responses to the newsletter's columns, columnists and challenges is also most appreciated. Everything, including my tenure as editor though, is subject to the proverbial "Swan Song."

All good things must come to the end, or so say the sages. Many of you who have served in non-profit organizations have probably been subjected to the Swan Song syndrome at the conclusion of your tour of duty or board term-limit. My editorship of the TRUSTEE newsletter meets the board term limit of (three, three year terms) criteria and now has come to a conclusion. Sam Patton has graciously taken over the task.

Surviving fiscally for libraries has become a great deal tougher since I started editing this quarterly newsletter in 1995. More and more articles, from a great variety of editorial contributors, have been directed to the subject of funding. Today, advocacy has become the watchword and with it the subject of a tremendous number of articles and discussions.

To our new editor, Sam Patton, and to a growing newsletter I wish continued success. So long...it's been fun and a great learning experience. I look forward to the next chapter!

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Libraries Make a Difference

Richard P. Mills, Commissioner of Education

Most people can quickly name a teacher who made a difference in their lives. That's one reason people support good schools. You can help them remember the same feelings of gratitude they have for a librarian. Who knows -- you might add one more person to the growing alliance in support of investment in libraries. For example, I remember:

- The town librarian who fed my passion to read everything about whales when I was in the 5th grade, and the librarian in the 7th grade who taught us how to outline a book;
- The librarian in high school who rescued me from study hall for a whole year and allowed me to explore a curriculum far deeper than the one offered in the rest of the school;
- The librarian at Columbia University who gave me the tools to do research;
- Mary Alexander, the school librarian who helped me become the best history teacher I could be in my first year; and
- The librarian in my community today who always thanks me when I show up to vote on the library budget.

Libraries are essential education partners. They provide the information that teachers and parents need to ensure that every child has access to a quality education. They provide the vital research materials that college students and faculty need to develop the leaders of tomorrow. People go to libraries to prepare for job interviews, to learn English, and to become literate in their own language. I remind business audiences everywhere that libraries are economic development engines. People want to live where there are good libraries.

Research shows that effective school libraries support student achievement – raising reading scores and achievement levels even in the face of the most difficult obstacles. Recently I visited a school that used to be a low performer but is rising fast now – in part because of a fine library program closely aligned to classroom teaching. Public library summer reading programs keep almost one million children in New York reading over the summer and, research shows, that helps them return to school ready to learn.

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Unholy Alliance...

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political health only by fostering every ounce of ability, brightness, intelligence, and other talents that may be inherent in its population. The “gift” of these people is a gift to us, not just to them.

Third, in regard to ideological attitudes toward the “gifted”, there seems to be a curious symbiosis between the ideologies of the distinctly right and left.

On the right, corporations “buy” talent and skill. Except for the very top management, highly developed talent or skill is just another commodity or raw material that is bought at the cheapest possible price. It is cheaper to buy it overseas, and, furthermore, the costs of developing it in the first place are not borne here at home. When our school (and library) programs at home bring our population to only “minimal standards of competence”, the workforce that emerges is a happy combination: adequate, cheap, and not disruptive.

On the left, our national history is seen as having imposed gross inequalities of opportunity upon millions of people. Therefore, counterbalances are required; so any program that brings these disadvantaged people up to minimum standards is a means to counteract artificial and socially imposed barriers to their reaching the levels of accomplishment that are otherwise potential within them. This premise that inequalities should be corrected can lead to a perception that the real differences in talents that are shown in “gifted” children (and adults) are also somehow also unfair, e.g. “...very bright children do not deserve specially tailored classes.

Fourth, I fear that an unholy alliance (to re-coin a phrase) between the right and left ideological opposites on this issue of “gifted” children may worsen our country's future in the long term. Since talent and accomplishment are indeed important resources for our society, there is no inherent justification in acting to help some reach their potential and refusing to help others reach their potential, just because it may be greater. Such refusal is not only discriminatory against the individual but it hurts the country.

The lesson for public libraries?

Public library policy and practice should explicitly recognize a responsibility toward helping the “gifted” as well as helping our traditional clientele. Budget-time rhetoric may continue to emphasize traditional themes to those politicians who are misled by the ideological distortions of what is the meaning of “gifted” children and adults. But, in practice, libraries can be more clear-eyed, and they certainly can find ways of encouraging unusual talent without feeling embarrassed or somehow constrained by these distortions. One simple (and low cost) program would be to cooperate with schools to identify such children, and then to design special reading programs or other library innovations. The key to it is to find, or encourage them to find, challenges for themselves.

Bring up the guys who lag behind, but also push ahead those who can go faster and farther; for they will be those who will bring us along in the future.

The Library Circuit

Sam Patton, NYSALB Trustee

What is the most unusual event that has occurred in your library? I would bet that many of our libraries have unusual stories to tell, not necessarily “library” related. Here is one from our East Fishkill Community Library.

On January 14, 2004 a young couple came to the Town Hall to be married. They had many family and friends with them, and the Town Hall was so busy with other meetings they couldn't all fit into the available space. So Judge Thomas Wood and the wedding party came next door to the library to see if they could find space. They not only found space, but the staff came up with decorations, and added witnesses. So that afternoon Naval Airman First Class Michael Walters and Meagan Van Aken were married in the reading rotunda of the library, with their families, friends and most of the staff as pleased witnesses. Airman Walters was originally from Hopewell Junction, and is now stationed in Florida. The top photo here shows the couple in the library. The second photo shows the couple, some of the guests, and at right, Town Justice Tom Wood who officiated at the wedding. We wish them both a happy future.

Now it is the readers' turn. What unusual event took place in your library? Please send me information, and pictures if possible. I'd like to feature stories from all over the state.

And I also owe a “Thank You” to Mr. Charlie Young who sent me a copy of “The Oswego Public Library - A History.” They are starting a fund drive for an addition and renovation. He quotes a letter of February 8, 1963 written to Miss Juanita Kersey, the Director of the Oswego City Library, by Marion H. Vedder, Associate Library Supervisor in the Division of Library Extension, stating in part - “We have searched our files and have found only one library which was chartered in New York State before the Oswego City Library. On April 20, 1835, the Young Men's Association of Troy was chartered. The name was changed to Troy Public Library Feb. 28, 1903.”

From the discussions and letters I received after my first “Circuits” on older libraries, I believe this substantiates Oswego's claim to be the “Oldest Public Library in New York State continuously operating in its original building.”

Thanks to all who wrote and sent photos. I look forward to hearing from more of you on a variety of subjects, and will publish your stories as space permits.



Libraries Make a Difference...

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Yet more than 900 school libraries and 400 public libraries lack essential services, and more than half our public libraries are over 60 years old. That is why the Regents' have advanced *New Century Libraries*, our legislative proposal that will bring need-based aid to our libraries; help renovate buildings; and support NOVEL, New York's Online Virtual Electronic Library.

The Regents and I are committed to making *New Century Libraries* a reality. We don't intend to back away, and neither should you. Library advocates have become increasingly persuasive and their numbers are growing. We continue to inform government leaders and policy makers about the importance of libraries and library systems. And our efforts are having an effect. Lawmakers understand the critical roles that our libraries play, and support for the legislation is growing.

We will continue our efforts to involve influential partners in understanding and promoting *New Century Libraries* while at the same time strengthening the commitment of the partners we already have. The list of *New Century Libraries* supporters is growing. It includes your organization; the New York State Reading Association; the New York State School Boards Association; NYSUT; and the American Council for the Blind. Think about the organizations you are active in and speak to them about becoming a *New Century Libraries* partner.

Trustee Institute...

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One item of business is the election of Trustees to the board of NYSALB. The Nominating Committee of the New York State Association of Library Boards offers the following slate of candidates for election at the Annual Meeting:

(Sharon P. Best, Pioneer Library System, for a first term, (Joan Hurley, Southern Tier Library System for a second term, (Norman Jacknis, Westchester Library System for a third term, (Samuel Patton, Mid-Hudson Library System for a second term, (George L. Stamatiades, Queens Borough Public Library, for a first term.