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BELLINGHAM PUBLIC LIBRARY

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2010 ANNUAL REPORT

*“The richest person in the world - in fact all the riches in the world -
couldn't provide you with anything like the endless,
incredible loot available at your local library.”*

~Malcolm Forbes

Honorable Selectmen:

In 2010 the library continued to meet its mission: “The purpose of the Bellingham Public Library is to be an important resource for all members of the community in their search for knowledge, ideas, information, and creative use of their leisure time.” We play a crucial role in the town by being more than just a place to read and borrow books; we are a true community center that offers services to Bellingham residents of all ages. We provide not just library service, but a clean, contemporary facility for meetings of town groups of all ages. The groups we host include: The Bellingham Crafters, the Mom’s Group of Bellingham/Medway, The Polish Conversation Group, The Bellingham Business Association, BNI Bellingham, book discussion groups, condo association meetings and Girl Scout sleepovers.

Staff

The library has met the challenge of managing staffing levels to maintain service levels, which were challenged by the budget cuts in fiscal year 2009. In fiscal year 2010, we were able to increase some staff hours using funding from other sources including user’s fees and state aid.

In July of 2010, Barbara Selvitella, a town resident who has been affiliated with the library as a trustee, volunteer and employee, retired from her part time position as Administrative Assistant. The position was filled by Carol Bonnell, a Library Assistant who has added Accounts Payable responsibilities to her duties.

Facility

As we have outlined as necessary in our long range plan, we continued making cosmetic improvements to areas of the facility which, after 20 years of use, is showing its age. With generous funding approved at town meeting in October, we were able to carpet and paint the community room. The room’s carpet was very worn and tattered. In addition to replacing the carpet, we also painted the room a complimenting color to update it. The room had not been painted in 20 years. In addition to the cosmetic improvements, the library director worked with Ernie Taft, the town historian, to create a photographic history of the Bellingham Public Library that is on permanent display in the room.

General Statistics

Libraries are historically busy places in times of economic downturns, and the Bellingham Library is no exception. Even though we are open 7 less hours per week, the core library services, loaning of materials and reference services, have not seen a decrease in use.

- More than half of town residents have a library card.
- Circulation of library materials is up 0.5% to 141,581 items in the calendar year. Given that this is our first full calendar year with reduced hours, 7 less hours per week than in fiscal year 2009, visitors are taking out a slightly increased number of items from the collection.
- The number of reference interviews is up over 26%. Reference interviews are sessions in which a librarian is helping a patron with a detailed information need. It is not simply directing patrons to a book or title. Normally these questions involve Internet, database and/or library catalog research.

Staffing

- Total staff hours are down almost 15%, a little more than the 13% less hours we are open.
- Part time staff hours are down 19% from last year.
- Volunteer hours are up 24%.

Collection

- The size of the library collection has increased by more than 3%.

Overall, the library has continued to maintain excellent services for the residents of the town with fewer resources than prior calendar years.

MLS, CW/MARS and MBLC Affiliations

Integral to the services we provide are agencies with which the library is affiliated.

As of July 1, 2010 the Central Massachusetts Regional Library System (CMRLS), our regional network, was consolidated into a new statewide network called the Massachusetts Library System (MLS). MLS provides access to online databases that our patrons can access from home or in the library. These databases provide access to magazine, journal, newspaper, and reference source materials. The benefit of these databases is that they are known reliable sources to which we can refer patrons doing research for educational, information or recreational purposes. MLS also provides the delivery of library materials. Through their services, between 1,300 and 1,900 items per month are shared between Bellingham and other libraries. Through the delivery system, if a Bellingham patron requests to borrow a title that the Bellingham Library either does not own or our copy is not available, the item is received, usually within a couple of days, from one of hundreds of other libraries in the shared database.

The Central/Western Massachusetts Automated Resource Sharing (CW/MARS) is our library network. The annual dues we pay to CW/MARS funds our use of the shared database that facilitates the sharing of library materials among member libraries. CW/MARS also provides our computer network for both staff and public access computing and access to a select number of research databases.

The Massachusetts Board of Library Commissioners (MBLC) is the state agency that supports, improves and promotes library services in the Commonwealth. The MBLC certifies that libraries meet standards in order to be eligible for state aid and Library Services & Technology Act federal grants. These standards include a variety of metrics, such as the number of hours the library is open, the education level of staff and funds spent on library materials.

The 10.4% budget cut from fiscal year 2009 again prevented the library from meeting the Massachusetts Board of Library Commissioner's (MBLC) Municipal Appropriation Requirement (MAR). The MAR requirement states:

“Public libraries are required to meet certain spending levels each year in order to receive state aid. Under the current system, a municipality must fund its library at 2.5% above the average preceding three years budgeted amounts. This is in order to provide balanced funding responsibilities within inter-library loan programs and continuity of library services from year to year. If a library cannot meet this requirement, it may petition for a one year waiver from the Board of Library Commissioners...”

In the fall we completed our state aid application and the waiver application. MBLC waiver applications were considered at the January 6, 2011 MBLC Board Meeting. After considering the waiver applications on January 6th, the Commissioners will vote to grant or deny waivers at their meeting on February 3, 2011. All indications are that since our cut was not disproportionate to the rest of the town budget, the waiver should be granted. Once the waiver is granted, we will be eligible for state aid and to apply for LSTA grants.

2010 at the Library

Throughout the year the Bellingham Library has provided **free wireless Internet access** for patrons. To improve wireless service, CW/MARS upgraded our service to an offsite router. This service is being used more and more on a daily basis by patrons using their own laptops and wireless devices to access library services, email and the Internet. In addition, the wireless service is available to groups that use our Community Room to make presentations, and conduct educational seminars and workshops.

The library has continued to be a gathering place for numerous community groups. In 2010 our **Community Room** hosted groups from all aspects of the community, including the Town of Bellingham, Boy and Girl Scout groups, sports groups of all ages, local businesses and business groups, school groups, Mom's clubs, playgroups, home schooling groups, the Polish Conversation Group, ten different condo associations, and the Bellingham Crafters. The room was used 28% less in 2010 than 2009, but we are open 50% less nights than we were last fiscal year.

Library staff worked hard to gather **publicity** to promote our programs and services. Each month we submit an article to the Bellingham Bulletin, Country Gazette and Woonsocket Call, and send updates to the Community Bulletin Board on Cable 8, the local cable television station, to keep the community apprised of library events. The Bellingham Bulletin does a wonderful job of covering library events. In addition to the upcoming event schedule that we provide to them on a monthly basis, their reporters are proactive in covering library sponsored programming and events. In December of 2010 the library began distributing a monthly online newsletter through Constant Contact. This will enable us to provide the library community with a professional online newsletter. The library had published a print newsletter that was suspended due to budget challenges. This option enables us to offer a similarly professional looking newsletter at a reasonable cost.

The Time and Print Management software on our **public computer workstations** has been essential in aiding us in keeping up with demand for public Internet use, with a minimal need for staff intervention. Members of the public with an active library card can self log-on to a computer. The system is also connected to a state-of-the-art color copier/printer which permits self-service printing. The printer is attached to a coin box. This system has eliminated waste of paper and is insuring that patrons pay for what they print. However, our public access PCs are in need of updating. They were purchased in 2002 and 2004 are inadequate to meet the current computing needs of our patrons. We currently have an average of 800 Internet sessions each month. Not only do they have insufficient processors and RAM to run current applications smoothly, their age poses daily challenges in keeping them serviceable. Keeping them free

from viruses, spyware and other sometimes unintended results from such users, even with the suggested software, is a challenge.

The librarians and library staff continued their *professional development* by attending workshops held by CMRLS and CW/MARS. In addition, numerous staff members attended annual conferences of the Massachusetts Library Association and the New England Library Association. Bernadette Rivard, the library director is the Treasurer of the Massachusetts Library Association. Nina Hunt, Youth Services Librarian is a board member of the Association for Library Service to Children (ALSC), a division of the American Library Association.

Two mandatory *state reports* were submitted in 2010. The Annual Report Information Survey (ARIS) was sent in mid-August; the State Aid Application was sent in October. These reports make the library eligible to receive state aid and grant funding from the MBLC. As noted above, the library has applied for a waiver to be eligible to receive state aid.

In 2010 *The Friends of the Library* funded programs, activities, and museum passes. The Friends of the Library funded \$4,754.90 for costs of programming and supplies and \$2,829.00 for museum passes. In addition, the Friends had two successful fundraisers: their annual holiday basket raffle was the most successful ever; and they published a Community Cookbook with funds benefiting the library. Without this funding, many of the wonderful programs we offer to the community would not be possible. We thank the members of the Friends for their hard work raising funds for the library year-round.

In 2010 the library continued to expand its *volunteer program*. We now have an average of 12 volunteers who provide approximately 100 hours per month of service to the library. With the decrease in hours open and staff hours, having reliable volunteers enables our staff to concentrate on library projects requiring specific skill or knowledge, and allowing our volunteers to contribute to the smooth running of the library.

Adult Programming

In 2010 the library hosted *lectures* on topics including: A Journalism Panel, College Planning, and Retirement Planning.

We promoted reading with three *author events*: Local authors, Randall Wheeler, author of Bound By Birth; Neal Sanders, author of Murder Imperfect; a Mystery author panel with three local mystery authors; and our annual lecture by Bellingham resident and author Jeff Belanger.

Every month our Reference Librarian, Cecily Christensen, hosts a *book discussion group* that has between 8 and 12 participants. This year was the 50th anniversary of the publication of the Pulitzer Prize winning novel, *To Kill a Mockingbird*. To celebrate that event, not only did we choose the title as our October book discussion title, we hosted Richard Clark as “Atticus” and screened the award-winning film in our community room.

In 2010, with the volunteer work of Bellingham resident and TOEFL certified instructor Lorrie Spencer, we were able to start an *English as a Second Language program*. Lorrie meets one-on-one with community members who want to improve their English verbal or writing skills. This service provides 5-10 hours per month of free English instruction to members of the Bellingham community.

Numerous times throughout the year library staff served distance-learning college students as *proctors* for their tests and exams. In 2010, as we do every year, the library was the local facility where community members could pick up state and federal tax forms.

In October of 2009, the library was awarded an “On the Same Page” *federal Library Services & Technology Act grant* administered by the MBLC. This \$7,500 grant enabled the library to run a community-wide reading program called “*One Book, One Bellingham*.” The grant cultivated a culture of reading and discussion in Bellingham by bringing our community together around one great book. The title chosen for the program was The Soloist by Steve Lopez, which involves themes of homelessness, mental illness, the redemptive power of music, friendship, and journalism.

Book discussions and theme-related events were held in February through April, 2010. A total of 7 book discussions took place in various locations in town. Seven events related to the themes of the book were held, such as a music therapy presentation, two concerts, a journalism panel, teen Wii Music, and two movie showings.

Due to the theme of homelessness, the library partnered with the Loaves & Fishes Food Pantry to hold a winter coat drive, diaper drive, and a Food for Fines week. A total of 310 winter coats were collected, 534 diapers (or 14 packages,) and 33 bags of food.

A total of 55 people attended the book discussions and 167 people attended the theme-related events, for a total attendance of 222 people. Over 400 copies of The Soloist in various formats were checked out of the library during the program. The attendance at events plus the number of copies of the book that circulated made this a very successful program.

In November the library had an *Open House Fundraiser* to introduce the newly renovated community room with an evening of music and food. Too Human, a Massachusetts based jazz trio performed while attendees visited the newly renovated room, enjoyed refreshments and supported the Friends of the Library raffle and cookbook fundraisers. The event was attended by state and local officials, library supporters and members of the community.

Staff Services

Although due to the Internet, simple reference questions are decreasing, our in-depth *reference interviews* increased over 25% in 2010. Our reference librarian, Cecily Christensen, provides top notch assistance to library patrons in finding information in print materials, online and in the library reference databases.

In 2010 we continued to see an increase in the demand for assistance with resume writing, *job searching* and job application. We found that many patrons needed assistance in setting up email accounts so that they could apply for jobs online. Many retailers and other service industry employers no longer accept paper applications; the only way to apply for these jobs is online. Patrons without Internet access or experience often come to the library for assistance in applying for jobs. We have submitted a letter of intent to the Massachusetts Board of Library Commissioners of our plan to apply for a “Job Searching in Libraries” Grant for the fall of 2011

Our *Circulation Staff* is the backbone of the daily operation of the library. Their exceptional customer service skills keep the library operating on a smooth basis every day. Whether it is answering phone calls, assisting patrons in locating library materials, working the check out desk or maintaining order in the library, the value of their contribution cannot be overestimated. We are continuing to adjust to the loss of part time staffing and hours. To their credit, the library staff has stepped up and continues to offer exceptional customer service every day.

Children's Services

Children's programming continues to be the library's most well attended, and in demand service. Nearly every day Nina Hunt, our Youth Services Librarian, has events planned for children of all ages. Programming in 2010 included two to three weekly sessions of ***Ring-A-Ding-A-Sing Thing***. It is our most popular program, which has attracted as many as 100 people with an average of 40 people attending each session. Nina has also offered 5 week courses for home schooling families, family fun time activities, craft and cooking programs, and interactive movie days.

Every holiday or special event, usually at least once a week, the library holds a craft making event for children, often as part of a party to celebrate the holiday or event.

In June of 2010, Nina Hunt visited the elementary schools in town to promote the library's ***Summer Reading Program***. The theme for this year's summer reading program was "Go Green @ Your Library." Throughout the summer, to support our effort to increase summer reading by children, the library offered many events to encourage summer reading. We supported the school curriculum by adding school summer reading titles to our collection. Also, the library hosted our first annual "Battle of the Books." The children formed teams that each read 10 books and then answered questions about the book with the team that answered the most questions correctly winning the blue ribbon for their age group.

Young Adult Services

The number of Young Adult programs also increased during 2010. At least two days a week, when school is in session, the Community Room was transformed into "***Teen Zone***," a supervised after school program where there are numerous activities for middle and high school student participation. Not only is there homework help, a place to socialize with friends and a supportive environment, there is fun! We have an XBOX, Wii and Playstation 2 for the teens to play fun, educational and competitive games.

In addition to the regular after school programs, Leslianne Lavalée, our Young Adult Services Librarian, has offered numerous other programs of interest to these middle and high schoolers. These included: Anime Club, Top Chef Teens, Dance Dance Revolution Tournament, Henna Party, Guitar Hero Tournament and Babysitting Training & Job Fair.

In addition, the library has a Young Adult Advisory Board, a group of teens who meet monthly to participate in decision making not only for the focus of the "Teen Zone" program, but also to assist with selection of library materials that are of interest to teens.

In closing, the Library Director, Library Staff and Library Trustees wish to thank the community for its continued support of the library. To quote Augustine Birrell, "Libraries are not made, they grow." We are proud to be able to continue to grow the Bellingham Public Library to meet the changing needs of town residents.

Respectfully submitted,



Bernadette Rivard, Library Director
Suzanne Garten, Chair
Michael Carr
Kenneth Hamwey

Russell Lafond, Vice Chair
Lisa Cavossa