

Library Advocate

Occasional Papers Reflecting the Importance of Library and Information Services in Grady County

Welcome to Library Advocate

Alan Kaye, Director of Roddenbery Memorial Library

This is the first issue of an occasional position paper that will keep our community focused on the importance of a vibrant information service provided by government to the public. Grady County is one place where the stereotypical image of an old-fashioned, outdated library should not be the guide for thoughts of our future.

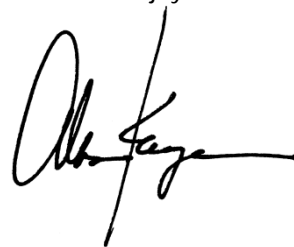
The library is a living, changing service that in turn changes lives and lifts people beyond their expectations. Exceptional library service is part of the reward for living in Grady County. We need to make sure that the library and information services that have become the hallmark of our community remain strong for future generations. Library advocates will be featured in this occasional paper, and people you know will make comments here and build on our advocacy effort.

As I write this introduction, the recession has finally caught up with RML. Local government is now examining budget proposals from the library that would have been unthinkable just two years ago, with personnel cuts and closings. Our future is uncertain, and local government is calling for the library to stand down from its usual way of operating and make deep, severe cuts. We must have an avenue in which to advocate the continuance of high quality library service.

I cannot imagine any better way to start than with the following unsolicited comments from Claire Hamner Matturro, retired attorney and author of four suspense novels featuring super sleuth Lilly Rose Cleary, who divides her time between Sarasota, Florida, and Bugfest, Georgia. With people all over the nation checking her books out from libraries, Claire has a voice that should be heard. Joe Jennette provides some thought-provoking photos as well, so enjoy those, and keep us in mind.

The Library Is a Necessity

Claire Hamner Matturro, author and attorney



Cairo's threatened Roddenbery Memorial Library needs your help.

In a civilized, Democratic culture such as ours, a library like Roddenbery is not a luxury. Roddenbery Memorial Library, like any public library, is a necessity.

While a library might not come immediately to mind as equivalent to food, clothing and shelter, a library offers resources that make a free, civilized society function properly. And without the safe environment of a democratic social system, even food, clothing and shelter would soon become problematic.

To a poor person who needs the library to get education and a job, a library has a big part in the quest for food, shelter and clothing. And to a culture beset as ours is with so many huge problems, informed citizens, literate and skilled workers, educated voters and enlightened participants are vital to keeping our society working and developing, so that we can provide ourselves with necessities. A library is one of the main ingredients in a culture that protects and provides our food, shelter and clothing, and, therefore, becomes itself, a necessity.

In a large scale picture, a library is one of the many essential tools that keep a democratic culture working as a Democratic society. The political system known as a democracy requires the participation of an educated body of people. We have all heard the phrase "informed voter" and the concept is simple: one needs a certain degree of knowledge to make meaningful

choices at the election booth. Without that knowledge, one's vote could easily be captured by demigods and despots. Where does this basic knowledge come from: libraries, news media, and public and private education. Make no mistake that in the days of declining newspaper readership, failing public schools, and loss of faith in main stream media, a library that offers a whole host of informational sources has an irreplaceable value. A library by definition offers us magazines, books, on-line resources and archives of materials that will help us check claims politicians make and to study the issues and to learn more about any candidates' background, and therefore make our votes count.



On a small scale picture, a library is a necessity to a multitude of individuals needing the resources for learning that it provides. A public library is a great equalizer in this country, much like public education. As a society, we love the rags-to-riches stories of people who succeed despite poverty or disabilities or country of origin. One of the keys in most of these stories is the person's drive for knowledge and education—and here the library opens its doors. A student too poor to buy the GED materials can come to a library and study to pass his or her high school equivalency test.

This works equally for other college and vocational admission tests... An able but poor student can find the educational resources at a public library to study and do well on tests that hold the key to a more productive life.

And it is not just paper resources and testing materials that aid our cultural necessity of an educated population. No one can seriously question the role of a personal computer and Internet access to the educational process in our world today. A public school student whose parents cannot afford a home computer and Internet access can come to the library and use the computers there.

These public computers not only allow students to fulfill their academic requirements and conduct research, but they allow people a means to find jobs and apply online. How many people are frustrated to find that the old system of employment want ads in the newspaper and paper applications forms have given way to online employment services? Those people, who do not have the skills or computer resources, can come to a public library and knowledgeable librarians will help them find job hunting resources and apply online.

And for the few remaining job applications that require a typewriter, your public library might be the last place to find a working typewriter. Roddenbery has one in the front corner, near the nonfiction books.

It isn't just the educational and job-related resources that make a public library a necessity in our world. It is also the library's role as official and unofficial social services referral agency. People who don't know where to go to get the help they need can come to any library, and a librarian can help them find the appropriate agencies or social services. Whether it is a battered women's shelter, an agency to help the elderly, or housing services, if the librarian doesn't already know the right phone number or the right contact person, she or he will find out and put that person in touch with the right service.



Consider in our own library, the Roddenbery Memorial Library, how Cathy Rieger, one of the many fine, helpful, cheerful librarians there, won an award and public recognition for her role in developing the CARE Center for cancer awareness resources. The Executive Director of the American Cancer Society's Atlanta office presented the award to Cathy. There is probably no way to count how many people's lives Cathy and the library touched with this service. If nurses are the angels of mercy, then librarians are the angels of our minds and sometimes, as in the cancer referral service, our bodies.

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Supportive Letters to the Newspaper Editor

Letters to the Editor of *The Cairo Messenger* from Peter Wright and William Rawlings

Our public library provides a wealth of social services to our community and offers an opportunity for all residents to inform and educate themselves. Our library is funded through our tax dollars by the Board of Education (1/4), the County Commission (1/4) and the City of Cairo (1/2). The Board of Education is considering not funding the library at all and the city and county both would like big cuts.

Reducing funds for our library will reduce the well-being of our community. Please let your elected officials know that you favor full funding. And if they say they don't have the money, ask them to stop spending our tax dollars on profit driven speculation.

Peter Wright

I had the pleasure of visiting Cairo last week as guest of the Roddenbery Memorial Library. I am the author of several works of fiction set in the rural south, as well as a contributor to magazines on a number of subjects, including especially Georgia history. I was invited by library director Alan Kaye who had been kind enough to schedule speaking engagements at the Cairo Rotary Club, the Cairo High School and at a public gathering sponsored by supporters of the library.

I am writing to thank the people of Cairo for their warm and enthusiastic reception and to compliment your community on the excellent library that they have built and supported over the years.

Part of the "job" of being an author is promoting one's works through book signings, public speaking, participation in writers' conferences and the like. As a consequence, I've had the opportunity to visit a number of libraries across Georgia and in adjacent states. I was quite impressed with your local library and the devotion and commitment of its staff and management. I had a bit of free time in my schedule and spent most of an afternoon there working on my next novel.

One couldn't help but notice the number of people who took advantage of the library's services, and the positive way in which the staff was eager to assist readers, job seekers, internet users and others. In today's world where even the most rural communities are tied into national and international commerce, education and literacy are all important for economic survival. Cairo and Grady County is fortunate to have such a fine facility and dedicated staff.

I appreciate the community's hospitality, and hope to have the opportunity to visit again soon.

Sincerely yours, **William Rawlings**