

NEVADA COUNTY PUBLIC LIBRARY

REASON FOR INVESTIGATION

The Civil Grand Jury elected to look into Nevada County Library Services because of reports in recent years of cutbacks in service and a general lack of support.

PROCEDURE FOLLOWED

The Grand Jury interviewed County Librarian Francisco Pinneli, reviewed the library budget and visited the meetings of several library support groups, including Friends of the Library, the Library Blue Ribbon Council and the Citizens' Library League.

FINDINGS

1. The library system consists of the main branch, which is the Madelyn Helling Library in Nevada City, the Grass Valley Library, the Truckee Library and the Doris Foley Library for Historical Research in Nevada City.
2. A May 1997 annual budget report stated that circulation had increased 10 percent in the previous year. Staff was reduced by 17 percent to 10.75 full-time equivalent positions, resulting in a service hours reduction of 24 percent. At that time, May 1997, the hours of service per week were 36 hours in Grass Valley, 24 hours in Truckee, 30 hours in Nevada City and nine hours at the Foley library. By the start of the fiscal year in July 1997 the total cutback on hours of service for all the branches was 20 hours per week.
3. In the 1996-97 fiscal year the library system used approximately 73 volunteers who work about 11,400 hours a year at no cost to the county. The volunteers saved the county a minimum of \$90,000 in labor costs.
4. County Librarian Francisco Pinneli was hired in February 1997. Prior to that, an employee in the County Administrative Office was interim manager of the library system. Pinneli's hiring came at a time when large cuts in professional staff were occurring. Four full-time librarians resigned due to fiscal issues. An additional \$31,000 had to be added to the budget to pay for the county librarian position. The total annual budget for the library is less than \$500,000.
5. Revenue of \$20,800 was added to the budget through a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU of 1996) involving the City of Grass Valley, the Office of the County Superintendent of Schools and the County of Nevada. The purpose of the MOU is to expand hours, improve facilities at the Grass Valley Library, increase children's materials and establish computer labs. This two-year MOU expires on June 30, 1998.
6. There were 33,500 library card carrying registered borrowers in 1993-94, with 47,000 (a 40 percent increase) two years later. Yet an attendance count of the number of people going to the libraries

suffered a 24 percent decrease and requests to reference librarians has dropped 11 percent. Circulation grew by 6 percent during those same two years. These data suggest there are fewer patrons of the library system despite a larger pool of potential users. This could be the result of a reduction in library hours, which decreased substantially during the years 1996-1997.

7. The county Board of Supervisors appointed the Blue Ribbon Library Council when Pinneli was hired in February 1997. Its challenge was to develop long-term funding strategies for the library system. Its recommendation resulted in Measure B, which appeared on the June 2, 1998, ballot in Nevada County.

8. The plight of the library system has had limited publicity, therefore solutions and support have been sparse.

9. Expanding hours, restoring children's programs and adding Internet accessible computers cannot occur without additional revenue.

10. The May 1997 report stated, "A library does not provide full service to its constituents without librarians and resources. Collection development and reference/research assistance suffers. The ability to reach out to children and foster a desire to read and explore is diminished..." The report calls for greater community involvement to create a vision of what it wants a library to be and to determine how to support that vision. "Ultimately the issue is not about libraries as depositories of books and computers, but about preserving the quality of life in Nevada County," the report concluded.

11. There are approximately 87,500 residents in Nevada County, which had a library budget of \$489,225 in 1996-97. Per capita, it costs \$5.59 for an entire year to have their three main libraries open, staffed with 10 paid personnel and supplied with information services. That is less than the price of admission to one theatrical performance in Nevada County. These data about Nevada County management of a county resource does not compare favorably with similar rural counties as noted in the statistics which follow in Finding No. 14.

12. The location of the Grass Valley Library attracts users of all kinds. The Madelyn Helling Library is isolated and is not conducive to pedestrian use.

13. The Grand Jury developed a survey of several similarly sized counties with comparable demographic and economic profiles in northern California (See Finding No. 15). It showed that other libraries have used a variety of methods in an attempt to keep their libraries alive. The most successful appear to be those that have leadership which is proactive in winning public and political support.

14. The table shown compares rural counties' level of library funding and service provided as found in the survey.

**NEVADA COUNTY GRAND JURY LIBRARY SURVEY
COMPARABLE COUNTIES APRIL, 1998**

	Butte	Calaveras	El Dorado	Mendocino	Shasta	Nevada
Population	199,100	34,750	142,000	85,000	162,700	87,500
Library budget	\$1,236,000	\$362,708	\$1,553,000	\$693,768	\$777,337	\$489,255
Per capita budget	\$6.21	\$10.44	\$10.94	\$8.16	\$4.80	\$5.59
& budget for staff	47%	62%	64%	73%	57%	77%
% budget materials	11%	8%	15%	5%	9%	4%
% budget loans/fac.	1.30%	3%	0.07%	3%	4%	5.80%
% budget other uses	40.70%	27%	20% unavailable		30%	10.20%
Number of branches	6	5	6	5	3	4
Hours open per week	130	164	216	133.5	68	84
Children's program	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
Active borrowers	38,909	11,800	70,000	46,020	35,563	47,193
Borrowers as % pop.	19.50%	34%	49.30%	54.10%	22%	54%
New borrowers 1997	unavailable	3,000	1,800	unavailable	7,945	2,808
Volumes in collection	200,229	70,000	285,000	154,689	170,255	111,946
Items loaned in 1997	485,758	84,277	577,417	315,471	246,126	327,771
New books in 1997	7,745	21,857	17,000	4,890	7,780	6,041
Internet stations	9 unavailable		4	4	5	3
FT staff hours/week	720	200	840	360	440	430
PT staff hours/week	unavailable	90	260	176	109	unknown
Vol. Staff hours/week	360	84.2	160	260	300	219
% budget pvt. Source	0.50%	0.00% <10%		unavailable	6.70%	unknown

These data show that Nevada County has the second-lowest per capita funding among the six counties surveyed. It also shows that Nevada County spends the highest percentage of its funds (77 percent) on staff yet ranks second from dead last in number of hours open to the public. The funds to staff ratio is the result of extremely limited funds combined with attempts to maintain as much public service as possible. It also has the lowest percentage (4 percent) of materials acquisitions as reflected in the second lowest number of new books added in 1997. The survey shows that Nevada County libraries are not serving the public well, even though a surprisingly high number of people (54 percent of the population) are reported as active borrowers who carry library cards.

15. Excerpts of written responses to some of the survey questions are given here.

SURVEY QUESTIONS:

Do you provide off-site services, such as computer access by modem, bookmobile, services through public or private schools, telephone information referral desk, or other? Describe.

--BUTTE: We have a volunteer-staffed bookmobile that goes out five days a month.

--EL DORADO: We are raising money for a bookmobile through private fund raising and hope to purchase and operate the new bookmobile by 2000. One of our branches is a joint-use facility operated by the Oak Ridge High School in El Dorado Hills. We do not plan to renew the contract with the high school.

--MENDOCINO: Computer access by modems are available. Bookmobile goes 23 stops in the county.

What alternative sources of funding have you used, and what mechanisms were used to get those dollars?

--EL DORADO: El Dorado County created benefit assessment zones for library services under County Service Area law in 1993 and 1995. All five zones have gone to an election and have been passed.

What strategies have you used to keep up with changes in technology in order to attract and retain users?

--EL DORADO: We were among the first participants in the State Library sponsored InfoPeople project, receiving free dial-up Internet access and computers at three of our branches in 1994. We offer introductory Internet classes to the public at least once a month. We charge two dollars for each public Internet hour, which includes up to 10 pages of printing. Our strategy is to jump in with both feet and to do as much as possible with the resources we have.

Describe your library system's relationship with powers that be in county government and with the board of supervisors.

--MENDOCINO: Excellent relations with county department heads. Considered a special district by the Board of Supervisors and they support the library within the tax formula (percent of assessed valuation). The board believes in the library mission.

How important is library location? Choose one: little importance, somewhat important, important, very important.

--BUTTE: It is important. The library needs to be visible, near places where people also want to go, and relatively easy to reach.

--EL DORADO: The main library in Placerville is located in a government center which is also near two major shopping centers and to restaurants. It is not close to residential areas, and patrons cannot walk or bike to it. The South Lake Tahoe Library is next to a campground in a recreation area, but off of a major thoroughfare and near to shopping and restaurants. The Cameron Park Library is located near schools and residential area, not businesses. It is very important to be near shopping centers. Being close to schools causes problems with unattended children, which is the same for residential areas. Put a library in central downtown only if there is shopping nearby.

--MENDOCINO: Opinions are shifting whether downtown construction on prime and expensive property is feasible and practical any longer. School proximity makes circulation look good (lots of thin children's books circulating) but often the adults are kept away by the hormone driven children and teenagers who have decided that the public library is their school library. Often, schools are not in the center of town and you like to catch people who are combining activities or trips (same point is true about parks). Shopping centers have always worked well for branch libraries.

If you had another 10 percent in revenue, what would you do with it? -

--BUTTE: Use most of it to add staff and the rest for library materials.

--CALAVERAS: Buy books.

--EL DORADO: We would operate our bookmobile, and use it to work toward developing new branch services.

Does your library contain a public meeting room area, and how often is it used?

--BUTTE: Yes. It is used quite heavily, mostly by other governmental agencies and nonprofit groups. We don't allow for profit groups.

--CALAVERAS: We have two, a conference room and a community room. They are used daily, sometimes hourly.

--EL DORADO: We have meeting rooms in Placerville, South Lake Tahoe and Cameron Park libraries. They are used by community groups for a charge of \$20 for two hours, and by county departments and by the library for programs.

What strategies have been used in your library system to rally public support for the library? Describe their effectiveness.

--BUTTE: 1-- Publication of our plight at times. 2-- Excellent service. We wouldn't be open if it wasn't for our public support.

--CALAVERAS: We don't seek support, as much as it seeks us. Since 1995, we have built a new 15,000 square-foot main library, a branch in Murphys and a branch in Arnold. West Point has moved to a larger facility. Angels Camp was offered half of the new county Office of Education Building. Valley Springs partners with the elementary school and shares their facility, yet Valley Springs residents are forming a group to build a new facility too.

--EL DORADO: We have fund-raisers, and special events to try to keep ourselves in the public consciousness. It helps to have a very specific need (like a bookmobile) to mobilize attention, rather than just "we need books, or we need staff, or even we need hours."

How have you determined what the public wants or needs from the library system?

--BUTTE: We haven't done any formal assessment.

--CALAVERAS: They tell us. We listen to their desires and try to comply. The county administration tries to increase our open hours.

--EL DORADO: Since so many of our residents have moved here from somewhere else, they often know what a library has to offer elsewhere, and tell us that they want it here. Attendance at our programs, and use of our services tell us what we are doing right. Careful attention to the materials and titles people are asking for, and quick response to those requests make us look efficient. Additional comments: A good staff is everything. Ours is dedicated, committed, focused, cheerful and public-oriented. They have a can-do attitude, are team-oriented, and are willing to stretch themselves. We use volunteers heavily for routine work and could not live without them. But they do not replace the staff.

--MENDOCINO: Library director did a planning process using the American Library Association. Eight public forums (held) with over 200 people participated and voted on types of services by priority order.

CONCLUSIONS

1. The Nevada County Library Services is barely able to function with the amount of staffing and dollars available, despite efforts of the Friends of the Libraries, the Citizens Library League and other generous donors and volunteers.
2. The Nevada County Library Services appears to be on the path of attrition that will lead to full closure.
3. Despite an apparent public demand for library services, there has been a significant reduction of resources.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. The Grand Jury recommends the county librarian work with existing organizations and individuals, including staff and volunteers, to aid them in becoming more visible as enthusiastic advocates for the library.
2. The Grand Jury recommends that the Board of Supervisors give Library Services more financial support.
3. The Grand Jury recommends that all future decisions about the role and placement of a library facility be evaluated as to the population that will be served and the method by which the library will be accessed, particularly if transportation and parking is an issue.
4. The Grand Jury recommends the county librarian work with superintendents of Nevada County schools to provide library resources to the schools.
5. The Grand Jury recommends the placing of library services with more convenient hours in or near shopping areas or pedestrian-friendly neighborhoods which could encourage greater family use of local libraries.

REQUIRED RESPONSES

Board of Supervisors
Due September 30, 1998

County Librarian
Due August 30, 1998