

## **Executive Director's Column: Notes from a Binge Thinker**

By Adam Wright, Executive Director, North Texas Library Partners

June 2010

Is your library essential?

This is the question that occurred to me as I listened to a radio report about the City of Fort Worth's Budget Retreat. The reporter told us that the city was going to be determining which city services are essential. He was interviewing a city official and the official said something like (I am paraphrasing), "For example, are the library services essential? Do we put them in the column of non-essential services, or essential services? This is what we will need to figure out..."

Recently, Dallas has made some radical plans to shave off budget deficits by reducing central library hours from 44 to 24 per week, eliminating 96 positions. We are facing some difficult times ahead and now more than ever we need to look at the services that we offer and determine if they are essential to our communities.

This recent trend ties in nicely to my next installment of the identity crisis series: Do we realize value by giving what the community wants versus what they need?

I sent a series of questions around to my usual listservs. I received a number of responses and most tended to fall on the side that we can give them both. There is no reason that we can't have a mixture of services that addresses the basic needs of a community and gives them what they want. "We can do both. Many (if not most) "traditional" library services are still needed and wanted by our patrons. A few are disappearing slowly (ex. traditional reference), but others are moving in to fill the gaps. Our patrons are forced (via taxes) to support the library. Our duty is to make sure that we are giving them something in return that they find valuable." Jesse Ephraim, Director of the Roanoke Public Library, wrote to me. He went on to write, "'Wants' and 'needs' are both important. The key lies in accurately assessing what they are for a particular community, rather than relying on what we THINK we know about them. We don't need to say we are going to be traditional or modern - we need to be a blend of both, tailored to fit our individual communities."

There were some that felt that it is arrogant of librarians to assume to know what the community needs. "The value of the public library is assigned by the people who use it and pay for it, not by the staff," wrote Cathy Ziegler, Director of the Plano Public Library.

Some individuals disagreed. "Librarians are educated professionals who should be able to analyze the needs of the public for library services rather than simply responding blindly to the expressed wants of a clamoring minority. We, too, have the obligation to provide for the good of society as a whole. We have not done

that. The concept of “give em what they want” has meant catering primarily to pop culture tastes rather than taking on the more challenging role of providing the information needed by citizens to maintain a healthy democracy.” Mike Baldwin, Director of the Benbrook Public Library wrote to me. Mike went on to warn me of the potential costs in providing just for the community wants. “That’s one of the reasons people were not sufficiently informed about the health care issue that will now cost them billions without significantly improving health care. People wanted cheap mortgages they couldn’t afford. That has thrown the economy into recession and created a wave of foreclosures. People want fast food that is killing them. People want drugs, and that has been poisoning the nation for many years. People want cheap wasteful energy, so we went to war with Iraq to control its oil and trusted oil companies to monitor their own operations in deep water drilling in the Gulf of Mexico. People want escapist reading rather than real information, so they are losing their democracy. Yes, people know what they want. They most often don’t know what they need. It is not arrogant for us librarians to provide for their needs, it is our duty. We are currently and for many years have been shirking that duty. Now would be a good time to become serious, responsible professionals.”

Once again, a common piece of advice given in the responses was that librarians need to be more flexible and open to change. “Librarians must redefine themselves. We must let go of seeing ourselves as mainly reference providers. We must hone the skills of teaching computer literacy classes, doing selection that results in maximum circulation, finding and working with community partners, performing successful grant writing and offering programming that brings the community to the library,” Cathy wrote. This piece of advice seems to be the undercurrent of my identity series. Librarians are facing an identity crisis in much the same way of their libraries.

To me, the true question is the one I started my column with: Is your library essential? When city/counties get together for a budget retreat, is what your library providing considered essential to the well-being of the community? I see both sides of this hot debate. I can understand that giving people what they want builds value into the minds of your patrons. At the same, we must find a way to balance this approach with giving something to patrons that have value in the minds of the individuals who determine our budgets.

Mike’s warning message is well-received when considering the question from the point of view of elected officials. Is it more essential for a city to give a patron something recreational to read, or is it more essential for a library to hold forums on the latest civic issues? Computer classes? Classes on finding a job? What will the city/county consider to be fluff and can easily be cut without the community being damaged? What will your city/county official find to be essential? Is the library essential enough in their minds to not be classified in the “non-essential” column of a budget worksheet? These are the questions you need to be asking yourself as you move forward into the next decade.

Next month, I will be tackling the question, "Serving the Youth, Where Do We Fit In?"

Now, here are some things going on around the System.

### **June Workshops**

Register for these workshops at <http://www.ntrls.org/ce/>. If the course is full, let us know if you want to be put on a waiting list.

- [Designing Websites for Accessibility](#), 6/10/2010, Denton Public Library North Branch Computer Lab
- [Designing Websites for Accessibility](#), 6/11/2010, Fort Worth Library Central Location

### **Consulting**

Here are some consulting activities that took place in May.

#### **Region 2**

Graham – general consulting (collection, programming and policies)

#### **Region 3**

Little Elm – grant ideas with programming  
Roanoke – Summer Reading and Pet Food Drive

#### **Region 4**

Blue Mound – standards  
Haslet – New Director Orientation  
Lake Worth – New Building vs Staff and Collections  
Southlake – Summer Reading and Pet Food Drive

#### **Region 5**

Arlington – Collection Analysis and Summer Reading Pet Food Campaign  
Haltom City – Online Resources

#### **Region 6**

Azle – Focus Groups  
Benbrook – Summer Reading and Pet Food Campaign  
Fort Worth – Facilitate Informational Meeting concerning the future of the library

#### **Region 7**

Alvarado – Summer Reading and Pet Food Campaign  
Joshua – Work with staff for transitional shift in staff

### **Other Misc Activities**

- TWDL – classes in Haltom City, Cleburne, Olney, Graham
- TWDL – Presented Webinar with TSLAC
- Overdrive Meeting and coordinated collection development changes/name survey
- Taught Image Audit workshops in Copperas Cove and Bastrop for CTLS
- Relocation Committee
- System Assembly Meeting – Coordinated Awards
- Meetings with CE and Awards Committees
- Attended online Brainfuse training
- Volunteered with the Don't Forget to Feed Me Pet Food Campaign's Ice Cream Social to raise funds for the Summer Reading program with 6 of our libraries (Prizes and t-shirts will be bought with the money)

### **Website and Internet Support for NTRLS Programs and Services**

- Regular updates to NTRLS.org website
- Website support for TechNet, Library Supporters and CYC Conferences
- Administration for NTRLS-supported listservs

### **Plinkit**

- Assistance to existing Plinkit projects and training for librarians at 7 libraries, plus the NTLC Plinkit site
- Assisted with new Plinkit project at Stephenville

### **North Texas Library Consortium (Evergreen)**

- Provided administrative and technical assistance for migration of Justin Library to Evergreen
- Technical and administrative support for North Texas Library Consortium project. Worked on settlement of cross-library fines paid
- Served as NTLC's and Equinox's contact point with TSLAC and OCLC for ILL Pilot
- Assisted with OCLC training session for NTLC on new ILL procedure
- Trained 4 librarians at 3 libraries on Evergreen Reporting. Provided 13 custom Evergreen report template
- Handled and/or tracked 36 support issues

### **General**

- Support for Librarian Live project
- Regular updates to Overdrive barcodes for participating libraries in Overdrive Consortium
- General technology assistance to NTRLS office, including preparations for technology changes connected with office reconfiguration

- Provided technology support and general assistance for TechNet 2010 Conference
- Attended NTRLS Services Planning Committee Meeting
- Attended training for RefUSA database

### Libraries Served by the Technology Consultant

<i>City</i>	<i>Region</i>	<i>Project</i>	<i>City</i>	<i>Region</i>	<i>Project</i>
Aledo	6	Plinkit	Lake Cities	3	NTLC, Plinkit
Alvarado	7	NTLC	Mansfield	5	Misc.
Aubrey	3	NTLC	Mineral Wells	6	NTLC, Plinkit
Benbrook	6	Overdrive, Misc.	Ponder	3	NTLC
Bridgeport	2	NTLC	Roanoke	3	NTLC
Burleson	7	Overdrive	Saginaw	4	Overdrive, NTLC
Crowley	5	NTLC	Sanger	3	NTLC, Plinkit
Decatur	2	NTLC	Stephenville	7	Plinkit
Justin	3	NTLC	Venus	7	Plinkit
Kennedale	5	NTLC, Plinkit	Wichita Falls	1	Overdrive
Keller	4	Overdrive			
Krum	3	NTLC, Plinkit			

### Special Interest Groups & Conferences

- LibraryTechNetwork SIG <http://www.librarytechnetwork.com>  
TechNet 2010 ★ *Ahead of the Curve: Learn, Explore, Engage* attracted 108 attendees. Of those, nearly 30% represented academic libraries (UT-Arlington, UNT, Tx Wesleyan, TCU, Tarleton State, SW Baptist Theological Seminary, TCC, UT Southwestern), about 15% represented school libraries (including private schools and Educational Service Centers), 2% special libraries (UNT Health Science Center, Denton County Law Library & a church library), and most of the rest were from public libraries – although we did have a couple of attendees from outside the library world! Among we've received on evaluations so far were these: *"The info was from beginner status and up -- thanks! Technology is not nearly so frightening when approached from a non-threatening, "we're all in this together" manner. :)"* and *"The tech petting zoo is a great thing that introduces me to software and hardware my library would never be able to afford."*

- LibrarySupportersNetwork SIG <http://www.librarysupportersnetwork.com>  
*The 2<sup>nd</sup> Annual North Texas Conference for Library Supporters & Friday Night Kick-Off Dinner Presentation (Your Library's Guide to Surviving & Thriving in the 21st Century - featuring Anita Duckor, President of Duckor & Associates, Inc.)* ★ July 23-24 ★ **The Future of Libraries** ★ ALL at Decatur Civic Center  
 Hampton Inn will post a website specifically for folks coming to our event and wanting to stay overnight. It'll include information about special pricing for our group, about the complimentary hot breakfast and even a map showing how to get to and from the Civic Center easily.
- LibraryYouthServicesNetwork SIG  
<http://www.libraryyouthservicesnetwork.com>  
 CYC 2010 ★ the 4<sup>th</sup> annual Children & Youth Conference for North Texas Library Personnel ★ Thursday August 5 ★ Lockheed Martin Recreation Area  
 Registration is open, and exhibitors are beginning to sign up.
- LibraryPresentationsNetwork SIG <http://librarypresentationsnetwork.com>  
 LP3 2010 ★ the 3<sup>rd</sup> annual North Texas Conference for Library Program Planners and Presenters ★ Thursday Nov. 18 ★ Lockheed Martin Recreation Area

**Accessibility**

- Registration is open for **Designing Websites for Accessibility**, a 5-hour hands-on workshop scheduled for June 10 at the Denton Public Library North Branch computer lab and for June 11 at the Fort Worth Library (Downtown) computer lab. Roanoke Public Library Director, Jesse Ephraim will be instructor/trainer.
- Amigos Consultant Christine Peterson has critiqued the websites of the eight libraries which requested that their sites be reviewed in terms of Accessibility and has visited with staff at each to discuss and explain her comments.
- Alvarado and Denton Public Libraries are finalizing the purchase of Accessibility Tools as 2010 Pilot Project libraries using NTRLS funding assistance.

<b>O2U REPORT</b>			
<b>Region 1</b>	Archer City	1 request	Bookmarks
	Burkburnett	1 request	Bookmarks
	Henrietta	1 request	Bookmarks

	Seymour	1 request	Bookmarks
	Vernon	1 request	Bookmarks
<b>Region 2</b>	Alvord	1 request	Bookmarks
	Bowie	3 request	Bookmarks, SRP materials
	Bridgeport	1 request	Bookmarks
	Chico	1 request	Bookmarks
	Jacksboro	2 requests	Bookmarks, banner
<b>Region 3</b>	Aubrey Area Library	2 request	Bookmarks
	Carrollton Pub. Library	1 request	Bookmarks
	William T. Cozby Public Library, Coppell	1 request	Bookmarks
	Denton Public Library	1 request	Bookmarks
	Flower Mound Public Library	5 requests	Bookmarks, Posters
	Frisco Public Library	1 request	Bookmarks
	Justin Community Library	1 request	Bookmarks
	Krum Public Library	3 requests	Bookmarks, flyers
	Lake Cities Library	2 requests	Bookmarks
	Lewisville Public Library	2 requests	Bookmarks
	Little Elm Public Library	2 requests	Bookmarks
	Pilot Point Community Library	1 request	Bookmarks
	Plano Public Library System	1 request	Bookmarks
	Betty Foster Public Library, Ponder	1 request	Bookmarks
	Roanoke Public Library	1 request	Bookmarks
	Sanger Public Library	2 requests	Bookmarks

	The Colony Public Library	2 request	Bookmarks
<b>Region 4</b>	Colleyville	2 requests	Flyers, bookmarks
	Eules	1 request	Bookmarks
	Keller	3 request	Bookmarks, SRP materials
	Lake Worth	1 request	Bookmarks
	Saginaw	1 request	Bookmarks
	Watauga	1 request	Bookmarks
<b>Region 5</b>	Birdville ISD	3 requests	SRP materials
	Crowley	1 request	Bookmarks
	Everman	2 requests	Bookmarks
	Haltom City	6 requests	Flyers, posters, bookmarks
	Hurst	1 request	Bookmarks
	Kennedale	1 request	Bookmarks
	Mansfield	9 requests	Bookmarks, reading lists
	Richland Hills	12 requests	Bookmarks, posters, SRP materials
<b>Region 6</b>	Fort Worth	1 requests	Bookmarks
	White Settlement	1 request	Bookmarks
<b>Region 7</b>	Burleson	1 request	Bookmarks
	Venus	1 request	Bookmarks
	<b>51 Requests completed. 10,270 Materials Distributed.</b>		