

January 14, 2003

2002 ANNUAL REPORT

*A good book is the best of friends,
the same today and forever.*

Martin Farquhar Tupper (1810-1889)

Honorable Selectmen:

During the past year, the library continued its mission to serve the cultural, informational, educational, and recreational needs of the community. At the beginning of the year, the library increased its hours of operation by opening a half hour earlier each morning. This not only benefited our patrons who are out and about early, but enabled those groups using our meeting rooms to schedule their meetings earlier in the day.

In February the library welcomed its new Children's Services Librarian, Ann-Marie Saab. Ms. Saab's warmth and enthusiasm were evident from the start. Her prior experience in Children's Services in Boston-area libraries enabled her to offer story times and provide Children's programming in the manner to which Bellingham's residents have become accustomed.

In addition to offering regular Toddler Times and Story Times, other Children's programming and activities this past year included: numerous craft programs; the group "Made in the Shade" performing New Orleans jazz; John Root's musical interpretation of Music of the Gas Light Era; a Halloween Craft and Costume Parade; both a Gingerbread House and cookie decorating workshop; and Tony Toledo's storytelling of holiday traditions.

Once again, the state-wide Summer Reading Program was a hit with our younger readers. This year's theme, "A Star Spangled Summer at Your Library!", invited children of all ages to read about our country's history and visit new places brought to life in the pages of a book. Each week brought an exciting performance to the library: Sparky's Puppets presented "Wish Upon a Star"; a program on "Americana" was given by storyteller, Mark Binder; Keith Johnson gave his interpretation of "Amazing Americans"; and David Polansky's program "Laughter in the Library" provided the grand finale to this summer's Reading Program. The Library Trustees wish to acknowledge the generous funding provided by the Friends of the Library, without which many of the above-mentioned Children's programs would not have been possible.

As evidence of the library's desire to foster communication and cooperation between the public library and the schools, Children's Librarian, Ann-Marie Saab, attended Educational Fairs at Stall Brook, Macy, and South Elementary Schools, as well as an Early Education Resources Day Fair held at Stall Brook School. Ms. Saab also participated in the Dr. Seuss Birthday celebration and read-athon at South Elementary. Also, as an aid to teachers and library staff, the library's "Assignment Alert Form" was posted on the library's web site so that teachers could more easily notify the library of upcoming school assignments.

Due to its membership in both the C/W MARS automated library network and the Central Massachusetts Regional Library System, the library gained access to several new reference databases. Three new databases geared for children are offered as part of Gale Group's *InfoTrac Web: InfoTrac Student Edition*, *InfoTrac Junior Edition*, and *InfoTrac Kids Edition*. In addition, increased access to area newspapers was made possible through the database *Newsbank*, giving patrons the opportunity to retrieve articles from the *Boston Herald*, *Worcester Telegram & Gazette*, and *Springfield Union News*. Finally, a print subscription to the *New York Times* rounded out the library's ability to provide timely information about current events to its patrons.

Reference Librarian/Assistant Director, Cecily Christensen continued her role as facilitator of the library's book discussion group. This group met once each month to discuss an author's work. Both fiction and non-fiction works were selected, providing a variety of reading choices over the course of the year.

During the month of February, the library once again instituted its "Food For Fines" program. In lieu of fines owed on overdue items, patrons were encouraged to donate food items to the local food pantry. In the fall, the Library Director and Board of Library Trustees gathered vital information about its programs and services to area residents through a widely-distributed "Patron Survey". From the nearly 150 responses received, the library was not only made more aware of its patrons' perception of library services, but was now in a better position to evaluate its services for the future.

The Friends of the Bellingham Library continued to be an important base for funding programs, museum passes, and the purchase of additional materials for the library. Although their ongoing book sale generates money to provide quality children's programs throughout the year, the organization would not be the success it is without the generous donations of books from the community. In addition to its book sale, the Friends held another profitable golf tournament in July, and a very well-attended wine tasting social in November, all to benefit the library.

Because of these events, the Friends were able to continue its funding of discount museum passes made available to the public through the library. They provided funds for passes to the Providence Children's Museum, Boston Museum of Science, Museum of Fine Arts, Plimoth Plantation (including the Mayflower), Roger Williams Park Zoo, and Capron Park Zoo. New to library patrons this year was the addition of a discount pass to the EcoTarium in Worcester. Other community sponsors of museum passes during the year were: Strata Bank (New England Aquarium), and Dean Cooperative Bank (Boston Children's Museum).

In addition to those programs mentioned above, the Friends purchased five new computers for the library, including a new Internet-access computer added to the Young Adult area. Additional funding for this computer was made possible from a donation from Wal Mart. The Friends also provided additional funds used for the purchase of videos, special reference materials, and other supplies and furnishings for the library.

Also, mention must be made of the many other community businesses, who, through their generous donations to the Friends of the Bellingham Library, give support to the programs and services mentioned in this report. Among those, specifically, the Trustees would like to thank Ben Franklin Savings Bank of Franklin, and UniBank of Whitinsville, for their generous donations to the Friends and the Library during the past year. Through all their efforts, the library was better able to provide quality adult and children's programming, and offered more comprehensive and up-to-date reference service to the community.

The library was not immune to change during the past year, however. In the spring, Linda Lord decided not to seek re-election after serving on the Board of Library Trustees for more than 10 years. Her dedication to the library and experience as Trustee will be missed. Her vacancy on the Board was filled by Kathleen Bartlett who won her Board seat on write-in ballot. In October, the Trustees accepted with regret, the resignation of its Children's Services Librarian, Ann-Marie Saab, who left to pursue other interests. During her short stay in Bellingham, children and adults were treated to many programs throughout the year and benefited from a selection of books and other materials purchased under her guidance. As of this writing, interviews with candidates are being conducted in the search for a new Children's Services Librarian.

In closing, the library continued to offer its patrons the services and programs they have come to expect and enjoy. It must be mentioned, however, that these services and programs would not have been possible without the hard work of a dedicated library staff and all the others who volunteer their time and energy to the library year after year.

Circulation Totals: 73,730

Bellingham Library Card Holders: 6,176 (does not include borrowers from neighboring towns)

Library materials: 42,983

Respectfully submitted,

Edward Migneault, Trustee Chair
Pamela W. Perry, Trustee Vice Chair
Mary Ambler, M.D., Trustee Secretary
Maryclare Burke, Trustee
Kathleen Bartlett, Trustee

Susan M. Peterson, Library Director

