

January 14, 2004

2003 ANNUAL REPORT

*How many a man has dated a new era in his life
from the reading of a book.*

Henry David Thoreau (1817-1862)

Honorable Selectmen:

The Bellingham Public Library continued its mission to serve the cultural, informational, educational, and recreational needs of the community. Operating during a year of fiscal constraint, the library, nevertheless, saw more use than in years past, with an overall increase in circulation of over 15%, and a corresponding increase in the number of patrons with library cards. The increase in circulation was due in part to a change in borrowing policy in the new year, allowing patrons to borrow most materials for three weeks, instead of two, and to allow renewals of videos and DVD's if necessary.

In 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. The library also welcomed its new Children's Services Librarian/Assistant Director, Sharon Brown. Mrs. Brown's prior experience in Children's Services in Rhode Island, combined with her warmth and enthusiasm, enabled her to offer story times and provide Children's programming in a manner to which Bellingham's residents have become accustomed.

In addition to offering regular Story Times, Lap Sit Story Times and Drop-In Story Times throughout the year, other Children's programming and activities included: numerous craft programs; Magician Tommy James; Keith Munslow, Story Teller; Musician Greg Cooney; a Halloween Craft and Costume Parade, and Gingerbread House and cookie decorating workshops.

The library once again participated in the state-wide Summer Reading Program. This year's theme, "Read, Think, Create @ Your Library" invited children of all ages to read something of interest to them, reflect on its meaning, then use their new-found knowledge or skills to create a story of their own, or start a hobby or project based on their reading over the summer. Each week brought an exciting performance to the library. Bubbleologist, Casey Carle kicked off the Summer Reading program in late June, followed by a puppet show presented by Puppeteer Sarah Lamstein. Science fiction author Walter Hunt of Bellingham offered a program on writing science fiction books, and children's author, Lucinda Landon, gave a program about illustrating mystery books. Other Summer Reading "happenings" included a Talent Show, a weekly trivia raffle, and a "Book Buddies" program which paired student and adult volunteer reading partners with children who wished to improve their reading skills over the summer.

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, Sharon Brown, 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.

Also, as an aid to teachers and library staff, use of the library's "Assignment Alert Form" was promoted to teachers through class visits and through the library's web site so they could more easily notify the library of upcoming school assignments.

Reference Librarian, Cecily Christensen continued her role as facilitator of the library's adult book discussion group, which has been in existence for six years. The group of twelve members met once each month throughout the year to discuss an author's body of work or a specific book by an author. Both fiction and non-fiction works were selected, providing a variety of reading choices over the course of the year.

As part of the library's Summer Reading Program mentioned above, Mrs. Christensen led a Harry Potter book discussion group for children ages eight and older. The latest Harry Potter book, Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix, was discussed enthusiastically by the participants. In February, Mrs. Christensen instructed boy scouts from Den 2, Pack 18, Bellingham in both Internet and word processing skills.

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. Discount passes to museum and other area attractions funded by the Friends this past year included Capron Park Zoo, the EcoTarium, Museum of Science (Boston), the New England Aquarium, Plimoth Plantation, the Providence Children's Museum, Slater Mill in R.I., and the Roger Williams Park and Zoo. In addition, mention must be made to funds provided by Dean Cooperative Bank for a discount pass to the Boston Children's Museum, and a family pass given to the Friends by the Bellingham Educational Cooperative for admission to the Davis' Farmland in Sterling, Mass. Finally, the Bellingham Cultural Council shared the cost of a discount pass to the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston with the Friends.

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, with 112 golfers and 37 local businesses showing their support for their library. In November, the Friends held another very well-attended wine and cheese tasting social with proceeds to benefit the library. Dominic Caccavelli of Dominic's Liquors provided a wonderful sampling of fine wines, Whole Foods Market contributed an assortment of cheeses, and Café Espresso provided gourmet coffee for the event.

In addition to those programs mentioned above, the Friends purchased anti-glare, UV filtering window shades in the Young Adult area, and provided funds to illuminate the library's outside message board. 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 Library Trustees would like to thank Ben Franklin Savings Bank of Franklin, UniBank of Whitinsville, the WalMart Foundation, Comcast, and Schafer Nursery of Bellingham 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.

During the past year, many improvements were made to the library building itself, making it a safer, more inviting place to visit. In addition to the new window shades mentioned elsewhere in this report, the library added new display shelving in both the adult and children's areas, added 24 linear feet of shelving in the children's area, and 84 linear feet of shelving for reference books. Extra ranges of shelving were installed for paperbacks and science fiction books, and 420 linear feet of shelving was added in the adult fiction area. A couch was added to the main reading and study area, and the program room in the children's area got a complete makeover with new cabinets, paint and carpeting.

In October, the Trustees accepted with regret, the resignation of its Children's Services Librarian/Assistant Director, Sharon Brown, who left to relocate to Florida with her family. 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, a nation-wide search for a new Children's Services Librarian is in progress.

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: 85,226

Bellingham Library Card Holders: 7,151 (does not include borrowers from neighboring towns)

Library materials: 47,556

Respectfully submitted,

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

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