

Remarks by Judith Auth, Riverside Library Director

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Twenty years ago when the LA author Carolyn See came to the Riverside Library to speak, she called us (Riverside and San Bernardino Counties) the "goat counties." Today we are the fastest growing region in the United States. In 1991 the Riverside Library participated in a Project for Public Spaces, exploring how a downtown library could be a catalyst for social and economic change. Today I am going to tell briefly how we became that catalyst. We presented the library not as being in the book warehouse business, but in the people development business. We raised the expectations of our public. And you can too.

Our 2002 ballot measure To Renew the Library was the first successful ballot measure for municipal services in Riverside in 40 years. The success for measure C belongs entirely to the Library Board and the campaign committee. In spite of the skepticism of our elected officials, the Library Trustees and the library constituency carried the day.

In 1998 the Library Board authorized a public opinion survey by Godbe Research. The survey results indicated modest support for a library tax. But before the board could act on the results, several events occurred in Riverside that sidelined the effort. You may recall the October 1998 City Hall shooting in which the mayor and two city council members were injured. Then two months later, a nervous policeman shot to death a young black woman. These tragic events put the City of Riverside under a Summary Judgment by the State's Attorney General.

In 2000, the library trustees met with the mayor to consider a ballot measure for the spring. But this time, it was the School District that was determined to go out for a major bond issue and the mayor asked the library to step aside. Undaunted, the Library Board asked for a survey update by Godbe. The results were not promising. At best, it looked as if an \$11 parcel fee could pass with the 66 2/3 approval. Eleven dollars wouldn't accomplish what the survey results said the public wanted so an education campaign was in order.

The Library hired a local public relations firm to educate the voters and to raise their expectations. Three mailers were designed to go to each household in the City's Public Utilities bill. The first identified what the needs were. The second outlined the results of several community meetings identifying what improvements were most desired. The third was delivered after the successful vote and urged residents to write in support of the library's application for Proposition 14 funds.

The campaign committee's first meeting was September 11, 2001. On that fateful day, all 13 of the invited guests showed up and began strategizing for a successful vote in 2002. The committee chair was a retired judge, the recent recipient of Riverside's Sunshine Award for the successful remodel of the historic 1909 county courthouse. Other members of the committee were trustees, members of the library foundation, the county law librarian, a lawyer, a CPA, Friends of the Library and our consultant who had prepared the educational materials.

Between September 11 and March 2, we raised more than \$80,000 in cash and in-kind services for one general mailing and ads in the local newspapers. One of our first meetings was with the Editor and Publisher of The Press Enterprise. Together with the committee chair and a trustee, I met this formidable person who grilled us thoroughly as to our likely prospects for success. I was later to find out that she was favorably impressed by our presentation and she gave us the support we requested.

An even more intimidating meeting was with the City Council who had to vote to put this item on the ballot. It was a library trustee who made the pitch, who laid on the rail between the speaker's podium and the dais for the elected officials, a quarter, a dime and two pennies. "For 37 cents a week," he said, "We can improve our library service delivery by 12 million dollars over the next ten years. That's just a nickel a day."

For promotion we enlisted teams of community leaders, business people, and educators to pose for ads and the direct mail piece. For the argument in favor we asked the popular president of the community college and the executive director of Fair Housing. There was no argument against. To get out the vote, we secured a telephone bank in the lawyer's office and called several thousand persons from the Registrar of Voter's list. We concentrated on those who had voted in the recent successful school bond election. We crossed off any who were opposed. We sent out absentee ballots registrations. We printed endorsements in the newspaper. We used automated calling the day of the election. We did not walk precincts nor did we make yard signs. We did not have media advertisements other than the newspaper.

On election day we received 69% approval for the \$19 a year parcel tax with a ten year sunset. In our annual report to the community published January 14, 2006, we headlined,

Measure C Keeps Its Promises. With a 20% augmentation in funding, we have accomplished a 40% increase in hours open and public access computers. We have increased programs and programming attendance by 66% for adults, 200% for children.

We have a new automated circulation system, one new branch library and two more expanded facilities on the horizon.

And now it is time to plan for the renewal of Measure C. The current measure sunsets in 2012. We aim to put a new measure on the ballot in 2007. If it does not pass, we have a couple more years to try. Our first goal is the formation of a new committee and then the accumulation of private funds to mount the campaign. Already the survey research folks are at work assessing the public's satisfaction with the Library's performance to date. The results due this summer should help us frame our proposal.

In closing I would like to reflect on the power of a successful election. The Library Trustees charged with the administration of the public library have a renewed sense of their critical role as interpreters of the public will and defenders of the public library tradition. They recognize that libraries have been notoriously passive about funding, accepting whatever is left over after public safety and development appropriations are made.

By capturing 69% approval, the Riverside Library is looked at with new respect by the elected officials, and the other city departments. Two years after our successful vote, the Fire Department went to the ballot box. With help from the catastrophic fires in the mountains that fall, they got 69% to build five new fire stations. Next year, the Parks, Recreation and Community Services Department plans to go out for a special tax. Their success or failure will be something we will study before mounting our next effort.

And finally, library staff understand that their performance on the job makes a difference in the public's support for libraries.

I am confident that Riverside's residents will continue to be willing to pay for the enhanced library services they now enjoy. Measure C has indeed kept its promises, providing more materials, more computers and more open hours. Borrower registration and attendance are up, programming audiences have doubled. The Eastside Library and Cybrary is open, demolition has begun for the expanded Arlington Library, and the Orange Terrace Library is on the horizon.

2007 is a year for making more promises to Riverside for its libraries, promises we are just as certain to keep as those we made in 2002.