

Likes Library

1426 Orca, Apt. A
Anchorage, Alaska 99501
June 5, 1974

Hon. John A. Carlson
Mayor, Fairbanks North Star
Borough
P.O. Box 1267
Fairbanks, Alaska 99701

Dear Mayor Carlson:

It has recently come to my attention that Fairbanks' very fine library program is under scrutiny by your Borough Assembly. My interest in library programs dates from the seventh session of the Alaska legislature, when I served as administrative assistant to the House of Representatives Health, Welfare, and Education Committee. It was then that I realized that libraries, particularly in Alaska, must be innovative and aggressively "out-reach" in their orientation if they are actually to provide a community service. Otherwise, libraries here provide minimal return to the community on its tax dollars and no return to most of its citizens. To many of Alaska's people libraries are a foreign institution, and to many more they have never offered any real service.

No library in the state, to my knowledge (and I imagine rather few in the nation), attempts to reach so many in the community as your own. While most community libraries advance into the community only by bookmobile, yours has moved on all fronts. Some of these efforts should perhaps be regarded as interim ones, primarily intended to present the library to an unaware or skeptical public as a community service in a personal sense. Some you may eventually conclude are inappropriate for libraries — but give libraries time to assume a new shape that the community will accept and use. If libraries are to remain (or perhaps more appropriately "become") vital community institutions, they must convince that they bring tools indispensable for the average citizen — and, equally important, that they offer a receptacle for community knowledge. In short, if libraries don't function as community clearing houses and centers, they're not functioning. I believe that the Fairbanks library aspires to all this, and has advanced considerably further toward attaining it than any library in the state.

Now, I understand that the assembly's current exploration is focused on the personality of your library director — a perspective which I would encourage the assembly to broaden. While I think it is indisputable that the growth your library is experiencing is directly related to Ms. Gavin, I believe that the approach the assembly would most profitably take is that of evaluating your library program. And to do this, feelings of those in the community should be directly heard by the assembly. I would hope that the assembly will also take cognizance that libraries across the nation are of necessity in the process of assuming a new identity with the customary tensions and awkwardness of change and that the Fairbanks library is in the forefront of that movement.

Letters

(Continued from Page 2)

I hope that my writing, as a citizen of another Alaska city, is not regarded as presumptuous. What has prompted me to write is my view that your library and our own borough's health department are the two finest municipal services currently offered in the state. I apologize for the length of this letter, and hope that its length does not preclude sharing with the assembly.

My very best wishes for a productive review by the assembly.

Sincerely,

Duncan L. Read

P.S. If it need be stated, I barely know Ms. Gavin, and am not prompted to write by my personal concerns for her.

cc: Fairbanks Daily News-Miner
The Pioneer All-Alaska
Weekly
Tundra Times