

Libraries Are Forever If We Continue Our Mission

Free public libraries are something that can often be taken for granted; however, this has not always been true. Throughout most of history, reading collections of books was the province of private individuals. Founding fathers such as John Adams and Thomas Jefferson had large libraries, but access was limited, by and large, to the owner and a few select friends. Benjamin Franklin, however, had a better idea. Free public libraries where citizens could avail themselves of a free education and self-improvement. An expansion of this idea was done by late nineteenth century social reformers and free public libraries came to be seen as a great leveler of society. Poverty, and recently ethnicity, were no longer a barrier to the accessibility of knowledge. Organizations such as the American Library Association and UNESCO have championed what some have called “the freedom to read.” Franklin Delano Roosevelt, in his Four Freedoms speech to Congress in January of 1941, stated that “As men do not live by bread alone, they do not fight by armaments alone.” Humans need that little something extra to make their lives meaningful. Having the right to read almost anything on the Internet has become a fundamental right. We must not take this right for granted. While the Internet has vastly expanded the spread of “information,” some see it as a replacement for books, magazines, and libraries. Budget cutters often have seen libraries as a low priority. Health care, transportation, and housing

are important priorities when compared to books and magazines. What the cutters don’t realize is that the very vastness of the Internet only makes the need for those with digital knowledge more valuable. We must continue to campaign for longer hours, more staff, better buildings, faster Internet connections, and a larger budget for our collections. Can we keep our libraries open from 7 a.m. to 10 p.m. seven days a week? Perhaps we should try. Libraries are not just storehouses that keep culture alive, but essential elements of a modern free society.

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Letters to the editor should be addressed to the editor and sent to Joyner Library, East Fifth Street, Greenville, NC 27858, or by email (scottr@ecu.edu). We reserve the right to edit all submissions. If you are interested in writing for *North Carolina Libraries* or would like consideration for news and product information, please send brief information to the editor at the above address.