

# Pushing Libraries: Yesterday and Tomorrow

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How nattering it is to be asked to write an article for *North Carolina Libraries* a decade after my first presentation to the North Carolina Public Library Director's Association. So much has happened to our libraries in the decade of the 80s and their future is so clouded, that this article provides me a unique opportunity to reflect upon excellence and ponder opportunities. The first part of this article is devoted to reminiscing about the spirit and energy that pervaded the North Carolina library establishment in the early 80s. The second is about a quiet period, and the third discusses possibilities for the first half of the 90s. If there is a bias, it is that I believe in the concept of free and available libraries appropriate to the times....look backward with me.

In 1981, during my first full term in office, Mary Jo Godwin was the Edgecombe County librarian and the president-elect of the newly formed North Carolina Public Library Director's Association. Throughout my campaign, she had helped me research issues that either cropped up during the campaign, or that I wanted to raise and address as a candidate. In addition to being very thorough and competent, Mary Jo was always friendly and courteous. Going to our library was a pleasure not only for me but for every other when I reviewed my files for this candidate who used Mary Jo as a resource. She treated every one of us the same — fairly and without bias. Ms. Godwin never burned a political bridge because she knew that she might have to come home that way sometime. When she

became the association's president in 1982, Mary Jo asked me to do a seminar on how to lobby legislators. That seminar was one part of a statewide effort called the "Three Million Dollar Push."

Every librarian had a vision about the local effects and the statewide result that the "Three Million Dollar Push" would have on North Carolina libraries. In libraries across the state there was excitement and energy. Librarians

and their staffs held parties for legislators and Friends to build consensus for the "Three Million Dollar Push." The Secretary of Cultural Resources, Sara Hodgkins, publicly stated that libraries were the number one budget priority of that department. Senator Harold Hardison, chairman of the Senate Appropriations Committee, and Representative Al Adams, co-chairman of the House Appropriations Committee, had committed to the push. David McKay, the State Librarian, had gotten grudging agreement on a new formula for the allocation of state aid. Libraries had become a squeaky wheel thanks to grassroots political activity by librarians like Nancy Bates, John Jones, Nancy Massey and Bill Bridgman and the dedication of a few visionaries. The excitement overshadowed deep internal conflict, however, because the new formula diminished local political clout. Although there were last minute attempts to change the formula, none were successful. The three million

dollars were included in the expansion budget for 1983-84, and the rest is part of our library history. Today, fewer than half of the 1991 House of Representatives were in office when the three million dollar push occurred.

When I reviewed my files for this article, I came across two lists of hints for lobbying legislators that need to be republished as we get ready for the library push of the 90s. The first comes from the minutes of the NCPLDA

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meeting May 4-5, 1982 (*editor's note:* These comments were made by Mr. Mavretic himself):

- Have a checklist on each legislator and get a commitment. Nail them to the wall if they press or if they change their votes.
- The squeaky wheel gets the oil; that's the American way. Letters do make a difference.
- Consensus is absolutely critical.
- Letters should be short, one page double spaced, all caps.
- When visiting legislators, keep your delegation small (one to three people). Be on time and leave early. Give time for legislators to react and write down thoughts. Don't try to be objective; that's the legislator's job. Be biased.
- Little things go a long way, especially photographic opportunities within the library.
- Most legislators view your product as "More and better books." You should stress that the libraries exist to

provide service to the people. That is the key for legislators. PLDA should become the established authority on facts for North Carolina Public Libraries. Each legislator should have a three ring binder on public libraries that is up-to-date and accurate. Your numbers must be creditable; they should be checked with the State Library and the legislative staff before distributing them to the legislature.

- Long-range goals are needed and must be accepted in your policy statements. They should be used for growth and for cuts. The right question for a planner is, "What should I be doing in the next five to ten years?"
- A good strategy is to tell people where you will cut, and then cut it if you have to when you don't get funding. You gain creditability.
- Review your performance by determining if you did what you said you were going to. Tell your legislator how you used the money.
- During 1981, librarians were their own worst enemies. Fight inside the family, but be united and present a solid front to the legislature. You either hang together or hang separately.
- With regard to the proposed State Aid Formula for public libraries, we had some questions about the income variable, but it is the best vehicle to date. Be sure you want this formula, because it usually takes six years to get it enacted. The library community needs to be unanimously enthusiastic in its support of any formula.
- A special supplementary money bill reflects weakness. It should be a part of the main budget package-continuation or expansion.
- Libraries are jumping through the hoop for peanuts.
- No formula will take the library community down the tube in the legislature.

- You need to have a plan, then go get the dollars to implement the plan.
- Get your funding through planning and through consensus.

The second list comes from the NCPLDA minutes of a meeting held August 19-20, 1982 (*editor's note*: These comments were made by Frederick J. Glazer):

- You've got to have an absolute solid front. If one legislator is not for it, they will split.
- You need enthusiasm to create visibility and universal acceptance of your proposal.
- Libraries have more people supporting them than other governmental agencies. Nobody opposes libraries and their funding. West Virginia State Librarian Fred Glazer calls it "Exploitation of confrontations."
- There is no known repellent to libraries. Most issues have pros and cons, but not the public library.
- Eleven thousand letters from Friends to the Governor will influence! There are no "Friends" for the sanitation and highway departments. Let your citizens express their needs to the legislators and how libraries have helped them.
- Conduct library appreciation days for legislators. Conduct letter writing campaigns thanking your legislators for their library support whether they gave any or not.
- Create opportunities for large crowds; take photographs, especially of legislators in the library and get them in the paper.
- Get a well-known personality such as Frank Gifford or George Plimpton to autograph books for legislators. Make it a non-adversarial confrontation.
- The best lobbyists are voters who are library users.
- The library is the only volunteer government service that is a pleasurable experience to the public. We

need to organize these users to support the library.

- Each year there is a new theme for the budget push in West Virginia; a three dollar check on titles and book-marks, the library "Now" account, "Make a statement for state aid," ties and scarfs for legislators with the library theme, "The Library Pie Needs State Dough."
- Keep your themes and activities plain and simple.
- Libraries are not budget busters. Your legislators need to be stroked year round. There are basically two methods, "the scatter shot" and "the sniper method."
- You have got to have enthusiasm and excitement. You've got to believe.
- You've got a great product. There's nothing to be ashamed of. You should use Pentagon statistics for every circulation transaction. For every book checked out, you have at least 10 circulation transactions. You need to create your own measurement for the statistical people.
- Remind commissioners and legislators that the county budget is not their money. It's the people's money, and the people can change their minds on how it is allocated through pressure.
- West Virginia conducts a two week training program for librarians to keep them aware and conscious of local elected officials. They set up trust squads for missionary work. If the librarian doesn't listen or have a positive attitude, then the Trustees are alerted.
- Library appreciation day in West Virginia happens just before the state hearings on the library budget. There are good special speakers and special gimmicks to hand to all legislators.
- We need to work together to get the money we need. There's got to be a new day.
- Be organized! Get people out!

In addition to containing a lot of common sense, what's striking about these two lists — one from the State Librarian of West Virginia and the other from a North Carolina legislator — is the urging for consensus and the parallels with the successful "Three Million Dollar Push."

In the second half of the '80s, the Five Year Plans of David McKay, the formula for the allocation of state aid, and the six million dollars for libraries joined peach pies and blueberry baskets (thank you berry much) as givens in the state library business. The library wheel rolled along with only an occasional squeak from the Quiz Bowl, or about intellectual freedom, or a Library Bill of Rights, or librarian certification, or satellite dishes. The legislator's library fact books that were religiously updated in the early 80s got put away toward the end of the decade as budget shortfalls, hiring freezes, and recession facts captured everyone's attention — everyone, that is, except a few 90s visionaries who, like their 80s counterparts, know that the next squeaky wheel time for libraries is just

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around the corner. This time the debate will be more about electronics and attitudes than money. No one anticipated the electronic explosion of the 80s and the effects it would have on library science, and no one expected to see the costs of electronic transmission plummet as quickly as they did.

Legislators in general do not appreciate the upheaval that computers are causing in library science, and they don't understand the switching station role that libraries may play in the technological/service world of twenty-first century America. The notion that

individual empowerment is directly dependent upon library configuration has yet to become part of our political lexicon. Substantive debate over the quality control of distance education is not on any legislative agenda. Debates about the relative values of books and networks do not occur in legislative study commissions. Likewise, the utilities commission has yet to start sorting through the boundary changes between communications, information, and entertainment.

My attitude about librarians is about the same after ten years. Mary Jo Godwin, President of NCPLDA in 1982, and Jackie Beach, President of the NCPLDA in 1992, both Directors of the Edgecombe County Memorial Library, are my personal librarians as I am their personal representative. I go to Jackie Beach when I need information — just as I go to my hardware man when I want nails. I believe the information she helps me get, or gets for me, is accurate, and I rely upon it. I suspect that nearly everyone of my colleagues in the General Assembly feels the same about their local librar-

ians, whether public, school, or academic. Beyond the home-town librarian, attitudes are not so clear. The fact that, as Howard McGinn states, “library schools are being closed, recruiting is stagnant, library budgets are being decimated, and libraries themselves are being absorbed...,” tells me that elected officials do not have a basic commitment to libraries and librarians. Further, there seems to be increasing concern that the profession itself is at a definitional crossroad and unsure of its direction. The time seems right to begin the debate over the role of

librarians in individual empowerment in twenty-first century democracy and the power of libraries in a technological society. Like most political debates, it needs to get started around something tangible with which legislators can identify, something simple so that the debate begins easily, and something expensive enough to get everybody's attention. My first thought is to debate transferring the CRAY- YMP supercomputer to the state library system in 1994 (when the next generation needs to come on-line at MCNC's supercomputing center). However, research shows that while the YMP is awesome at high speed computing, it is not designed to be the keystone of an integrated library system. Next, I talked with Doug Koontz and Julie Lahann at IBM about IBM-RS-6000s or IBM-AS-400s as the base for an integrated system. Those discussions led to a rough estimate of five million dollars a year for one-time, non-recurring expenditures for hardware and software for each of the next five years. A maximum of a twenty-five million dollar capital appropriation would enable North Carolina to become the national leader in library evolution. The target amount is big enough to attract attention; the hardware and software is tangible; and, to politicians, the goal appears straightforward. For librarians, however, the real issue is the additional cost of a transition to mass acquisitions and processing.

Now the question is, “How do we begin?” It seems to me that our State Librarian, Howard McGinn, has laid that out very well in his six points in the Winter 1991 edition of *North Carolina Libraries*.

1. Hold the state conference every year.
2. Reorganize NCLA in order to deal with issues that face the entire profession.
3. Elect NCLA presidents on leadership rather than a rotation.

4. Put substance and purpose in NCLA meetings.
5. Hold the NCLA conference in conjunction with non-library associations.
6. Limit membership to NCLA to professional librarians.

What the association chooses to do relative to Howard's six points may very well hinge on the debate over six other issues:

1. The need for dependable budgets that enable every library user to have access to the enormous amount of available information and that define the missions assigned to libraries.
2. The responsibility of public schools, community colleges, and the university system for teaching computer and information literacy.

3. The balance between books and electronic inventory, and a commitment to a standard of over 2 books per capita.
4. The return on taxpayer investment in public information assets and the related marketing plans for public information services and products that compete with commercial providers.
5. The relationship between electronic highways and technology libraries and the relationship of electronic highways to traditional infrastructure.
6. The need for a comprehensive information policy that provides access, yet respects confidentiality, and a resolution of the copyright dilemma.

Even the most superficial response to these six issues and Howard's six points should be the notion that the relationships between librarians, libraries, and the tax paying public is under increasing tension, and that energetic activity is required... at the 1992 North Carolina Association Annual Conference.

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