

Crises in our libraries are not new. Your crisis today may be a dripping pipe over a range of shelving. Tomorrow it may be the sudden illness of a staff member or an unusual assignment by a local teacher.

There are other kinds of crises, however, some of which are discussed in this special issue of *North Carolina Libraries*. The one I want to speak about here is the long-term economic crisis in libraries.

Some of us are acutely aware because we were early victims of budget cuts and rising prices. The more fortunate who escaped for a while are now feeling the impact.

The ramifications are serious. For all of us. For our state. For our country. For the world.

At the 1992 Midwinter Conference of the American Library Association, President Patricia Schuman launched a public relations campaign to raise the visibility of libraries and library personnel. She kicked off a telephone call-in campaign to ask Americans to call an 800 number and express their support for libraries and librarians ... of all types.

As a part of that campaign, I wrote a letter to each member of the North Carolina Library Association and asked for help communicating an important message to the American public.

Your right to know and to access information is being threatened. Locally, many libraries are facing the most severe budget cuts since the Great Depression. As always during a depressed economy, we are getting reports that library use is on the rise.

You can't exercise your right to know if your library is closed. You can't exercise your right to know if you don't know how to read. And you can't exercise your right to know if someone else is telling you what you can or can't read.

I asked about local crises. How are funding cuts affecting your library and the services you offer to your patrons?

Your responses were immediate and distressing. Here are excerpts from some of them.

— The Macon County Public Library has had the same operating budget from the county for three consecutive years. Hours have been cut. The library is now closed Sundays and Monday evenings.

— When library staff vacancies occur at the Nantahala Regional Library, the positions are being filled with lesser qualified personnel who are paid less than the state mandated salaries.

— The state no longer mandates a budget

## From the President

Janet Freeman, President

for school libraries. Money that would have been allocated to libraries is lumped together with instructional supplies and textbooks, and whether a library gets any budget at all is up to the county or the individual school. When money is scarce, as it was this year, there is simply no contest.

— Bookmobile service from the East Albemarle Regional Library has been discontinued in one county and cut in half in three others. Local budgets are frozen.

— In 1989/90 the Walter Clinton Jackson Library at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro added a third fewer books than were purchased a decade earlier, despite significant growth in enrollments and programs during that time.

— At the Shepard Pruden Memorial Library in Edenton purchase of a new heat pump for the children's room and library office has been deferred for several years.

— Public school system media coordinators are being eliminated or given additional non-library responsibilities, thus diminishing the support for school libraries and media centers.

— Increasing costs of books, CD-ROM databases, and equipment service contracts makes upgrading 10-year-old microcomputers in school libraries impossible.

Since 1987 the North Carolina State University Libraries have canceled 3,045 journal subscriptions. No new serials titles have been purchased during this five-year period, and the size of the journal and serials collection has decreased by sixteen percent. Monograph purchases have declined by more than fifty percent.

Budget for AV equipment — TV/VCRs, record players, filmstrip projectors, audio-cassette tape players/recorders, etc. — was completely cut last year from another school budget.

In 1990/91 Belk Library at Appalachian

State University faced a one hundred thousand dollar deficit in periodical subscription renewals, which resulted in the cancellation of over four hundred titles.

Forsyth County Public Library had to eliminate the positions of eleven full- and part-time staff. Thirty percent of all standing orders and twenty-five percent of all serials were cut. All bookmobile service has been eliminated.

A school librarian wrote, "We worry about our children's scores on the SAT, but we cut the budgets for books at school and public libraries. We talk about restructuring education, but we cut funds in the very places that could make a real difference in

the way children are taught. We worry about the work force of tomorrow, but we cut the funds for technology and all the wonderful ways to access information that are now available."

A university librarian wrote, "Should we tell this generation of college students, 'Sorry, but we can't afford to provide you with the resources essential to your education. Come back when things are better.'?"

Our budgets are suffering and the short-term impact is obvious to us, but to communicate the seriousness of the long-term ramifications, we must raise the awareness of those who fund our libraries ... these repositories of the knowledge of civilization are being victimized. We as library personnel and supporters have the responsibility to speak out for libraries and see that this most democratic of all places in our society is not jeopardized.

We have made a start but we must continue. Library personnel in North Carolina rallied to spread the word and generated 2,578 calls during the "Call for America's Libraries" Campaign, the fourth highest state in the United States!

One of NCLA Executive Board's goals for this biennium is to promote libraries of all types and formulate and implement an external marketing campaign to get that word out, but the Marketing and Public Relations Committee cannot do it alone. You need to be a part of the initiative also.

Did you read Cal Shepard's excellent article "Speak Up for Kids!" in the May/June 1992 issue of *Tar Heel Libraries*? She made some practical suggestions about how to be a positive voice and take positive action which all of us can use, no matter what our type of library. I encourage you to read it.

We're in this together and unless we work together, we will not succeed.