
Over to You

Letters to the Editor

A great deal has been written and spoken in the past several weeks regarding the publication of articles in NORTH CAROLINA LIBRARIES. While this journal will always strive to remain vigilant regarding factual information and writing style, we are essentially a professional publication whose primary goal is to be a forum for ideas as well as for information.

If the editorial board refuses to publish an article because we fear the ideas espoused will offend a segment of our readership, we are acting as censors. If we as librarians in all types of libraries are serious about our stand in supporting intellectual freedom, then we cannot back down when it hits closest home. We cannot in good conscience criticize religious and political censors if we refuse to allow the publication of an article simply because it criticizes one of our own.

As mentioned in the Spring 1987 issue, we welcome your comments and ideas. Implicit in this invitation is an offer for response from the persons most closely related to any issue under discussion. The freedom of expression of ideas, particularly those ideas which force us to re-examine ourselves and our modus operandi, is an exciting opportunity and responsibility. We choose to encourage it.

The Editorial Board

Dear Editor:

I enclose a copy of a letter recently mailed to Ruth Katz concerning her article which appeared in the Spring edition of "North Carolina Libraries."

I sincerely feel that it was unfortunate that you chose to publish such an article so full of inflammatory remarks that have no real basis for valid discussion.

I would like very much to see this letter printed as a response to this article. I feel you owe public libraries the right to respond to this form of irresponsible mud slinging.

With kindest regards, I remain,

John W. Jones

Director of Libraries

Neuse Regional Public Library

Dear Miss Katz:

I read your article in the Spring issue of "North Carolina Libraries" with a great deal of amusement and wonder: amusement, because most of the statements you made were nothing more than opinions and innuendoes; wonder, because you who hold a position as a scholar should know that statements made without any supporting data are absolutely and totally worthless.

Your opinionated attacks on the Friends and Trustees are an abomination and if read by the wrong person would do nothing more than cause harm. At no time did you present any form of evidence to support your invalid assumptions. You simply stood back and slung mud. Believe me, it doesn't take a scholar to do that.

Your few statements concerning the Public Library Directors' Association also indicate that you did absolutely no research concerning your topic. The one true statement you made was that you didn't know why the Association existed. However, if you are interested, I'll be sure you get an invitation to our next meeting.

Since your article opened the door to opinions, let me give you mine concerning one facet you discussed. To assume that all libraries should and do work for a common goal is not a valid assumption. All libraries deal to some degree in the same product; however, our mission statements and populations served are many times quite different. The overlap by user populations, as reported through the literature with valid research, at no time exceeds 15%. To place this in context with reality, the public libraries exist very nicely without the academic or special libraries. In my library, circulation exceeds almost 50,000 items per month. We borrow less than 20 items from our academic neighbors. At Forsyth County over 150,000 items are circulated per month. They borrow less than 50 items from academic or special libraries. The goal you seek is not the goal we seek. If you assume that there is a common goal for all libraries, then you are wrong.

Your statements concerning librarians who have worked in other states is so ridiculous and

illogically conceived that it does not merit a thoughtful response; however, I will again challenge you to bring forth your documentation. If such documentation does exist, then it deserves national distribution.

To be totally honest, I am more disappointed in the journal than I am with your work. You are entitled to your opinions. They just don't belong in a professional publication.

John W. Jones
Director of Libraries
Neuse Regional Public Library

Dear Editor:

It is refreshing to have strong opinions voiced in *North Carolina Libraries* as was the case with Ruth Katz's article in the spring 1987 issue. It's too bad that many of the opinions expressed were uninformed. Trying to address the numerous misconceptions would take an article of equal length.

However, I think a free copy of *FLASH* would go a long way in soothing Ruth. So I'll be mailing a copy of mine to her so she can keep abreast of public library activities.

Jerry A. Thrasher, Director
Cumberland County Public
Library & Information Center

Dear Editor:

It is a pity Ms. Katz is not more knowledgeable of the public libraries she criticizes (Spring 1987 *North Carolina Libraries*). Adequate funding is the basis of good library service and groups such as the Public Library Directors Association, the Friends of North Carolina Public Libraries, and the North Carolina Library Trustee Association have all been instrumental in seeing that the state provides increased financial support to its public libraries. Since I have been in North Carolina (1982), this figure has increased from \$4.3 million to over \$10.7 million. These increases have provided funds for improved collections and library services which benefit all library users. They also have allowed libraries to hire additional staff and improve professional salaries. This in itself will do more than any other factor toward increasing the "representativeness" of library staff Ms. Katz feels so strongly about.

Concerning our lack of cooperation, public libraries have long taken a lead in this area. "ZOC's" were characterized by significant public library involvement, as have many of the continuing education opportunities that are available in this state. At the same time, I would note that such cooperation must be cost effective and serve a significant public need.

As to the role of the State Library, comment is best left up to Jane Williams, the State Librarian. However, it is my understanding that while the State Library can and does provide guidance and assistance to all libraries in North Carolina, it has a specific charge to "promote the establishment and development of public library services throughout all sections of the state." If Ms. Katz feels the State Library is derelict in the non-public library area, some more specifics, I am sure, would be appreciated by the State Librarian.

In conclusion, I can only agree with Ms. Katz's introduction, "This article is one person's assessment of librarianship..." Unfortunately, it is that and nothing more.

David M. Paynter, Director
New Hanover County Public
Library

Dear Editor:

I would like to respond to a portion of Ruth Katz's article "New Opportunities, New Choices: Some Observations About Libraries in North Carolina," in the Spring 1987 issue of *North Carolina Libraries*, concerning the North Carolina Library Association.

Many of us recall the study leading to the publication *North Carolina 2000* addressing statewide concerns such as education, environment, crime, health, etc., but not addressing information as a concern of this state in entering the twenty-first century. Further the role of the information delivery systems of the state—namely our libraries—was relegated to that of preservation and recreation.

Clearly the total library services of our state need higher visibility not only among our citizens but our leaders and planners. In my view NCLA is a primary organization in our state to bring this about. The State Library exerts a strong leadership role for librarianship in our state, but because it is part of the executive branch of government there are some constraints on action it can take. NCLA on the other hand can serve as a coalition of all the libraries of the state in addressing matters of local, state and national concern, and can act with fewer, or at least different, constraints. Together these two entities are a formidable force for action.

And what are some of the actions we need to take to be ready for the year 2000? For starters we can be vigorous advocates for public access to public information—local, state and national; we can adopt a proactive role toward the next White House Conference; we can work with our library schools in fostering research appropriate for the

advancement of library service in our state, and publish the results; we can be the leaders in adopting a proactive cooperative attitude embracing the total communities in which we operate. And of course we can continue our commitment to the advancement of librarians in our state.

To enable NCLA to achieve this potential some changes should be considered. For example, ours is a voluntary organization which places considerable demands on our elected officials; let's be sure that all our offices elected membership-wide be offices of substance. Let's examine the duties and responsibilities of each and make sure that when we ask our talented leaders to serve in an office it is one that offers a challenge and is important to the furtherance of the association, not one that is more honorary than substantive. And while we are at it, let's reduce the labor-intensive and time-consuming chores that we presently impose on our Secretary and Treasurer, by contracting for those services. All we'll lose is the tedium; we'll retain control and free our officers for the proactive, innovative policy-making roles we elected them to serve.

Although we are a voluntary organization, we do not have to continue the puritan ethic of a make-do association. Let's have a dues structure that is realistic, and provides adequate support to the various units of NCLA. For me, those units addressing type of library have been less stimulating than those addressing library functions. Perhaps for others they have equal value. We might consider abolishing the requirement that a member might first join a particular unit, abolish the

"free" unit, and simply let members join any and as many units as they wish setting a fee that will truly support a unit.

I have often heard persons say not to make waves, not to rock the boat, but the logical conclusion of that is seldom mentioned: if there are no waves and a boat is not rocking that boat is probably dead in the water, going nowhere, except perhaps in circles. NCLA is not dead in the water, but change will be needed to provide the viable, vigorous organization we need as we approach the next century. We have enough time to be ready.

Let's take the report of the Futures Committee and Ruth Katz's article as vehicles for intensive—even heated—discussion by the full membership, both in print and face to face. Then let's combine our discussion with just as vigorous an "attitudinal adjustment" visit to the local pub, where the target is on the wall, not personal!

Marjorie W. Lindsey

Member, Futures Committee

Dear Editor:

Thank you for inaugurating the column "Over To You" for reader feedback. In examining the last five issues of *North Carolina Libraries*, I found not a single letter to the editor. Hopefully, every issue beginning with this one will include at least one such letter. In the absence of any letters to the editor, the question "Is anyone reading this journal?" may legitimately be raised.

The feature I enjoy most in each issue is the section entitled "New North Carolina Books," an excellent selection tool. In my view, this section should be expanded to include more titles, including pamphlets as well as books.

More illustrations—photos as well as charts and graphs—would help to improve the overall appearance of the journal.

The quality of our state library journal is good, but, like the quality of American education, it can always be improved.

Alva Stewart

Reference Librarian
N.C. A&T University

NORTH CAROLINA LIBRARIES invites your comments. Please address and sign with your name and position all correspondence to: Frances B. Bradburn, Editor, NORTH CAROLINA LIBRARIES, 2431 Crabtree Boulevard, Raleigh, N.C. 27604. We reserve the right to edit all letters for length and clarity. Whenever time permits, persons most closely related to the issue under discussion will be given an opportunity to respond to points made in the letter. Deadline dates will be the copy deadlines for the journal: February 10, May 10, August 10, and November 10.

