

NATIONAL LIBRARY WEEK: AN EDITORIAL

by

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National Library Week has been successful in its ten years under the sponsorship of the National Book Council and the American Library Association. It was and is intended to culminate a year-long program designed to make the general public aware of libraries, their services, and their needs. It has brought the nation's libraries to the attention of Federal and state legislators with the results of additional support and funds for libraries.

The hierarchy as suggested by National Headquarters is for the Executive Director, Deputy Director, and the steering committee for the state program to be everyday working librarians representing various denominations of libraries—school, college and university, public, and special. The steering committee in turn suggests to the National Organization the names of several interested and influential citizens, one to be chosen as chairman of National Library Week for the state. The chairman then appoints, with the advice of the steering committee, a representative group over the state to act as local or county leaders for activities in their areas. On the state level there are various committees for news media, public relations, contests, etc.

Though the above does take place, much of it is lip service. Unless an extremely active and influential person is chairman, the local leaders may be inactive, and unless librarians in the area have a particular axe to grind at the time—the week which is culminating their year-long program—they are prone not to push National Library Week at all.

In correspondence with past Executive Directors, representing schools, colleges, and public libraries, the comments on National Library Week have been that school libraries usually observe and place their emphasis on Children's Book Week in the fall when they are cranking up their programs for the year, and NLW comes at the wrong time. They do use posters and other materials for bulletin boards, but the school library is directed toward the student and does not generally try to involve the outside community. The college and university comments were very similar—"play to a captive audience;" "NLW comes during term paper time and we have more than we can say grace over without trying to stimulate outside business;" "we use materials for display."

The public libraries are therefore the producers of some publicity for the news media, programs, or projects. But many public libraries have found that they receive more publicity and public participation during the opening of a library or branch or during a bond campaign than for any special activities they may contrive for NLW, unless the two just happen to be concurrent.

National Library Week was conceived during a period when it was "in" to have a "national week." Since its inception, every group imaginable has put in a bid for national recognition during a week or for a day. A quick look at Chase's *Calendar of Events* will point up this fact with "Want Ad Week" in March, "National Newspaper Week" in October, and "International Tuna Week," "Tableware Week," and "Asparagus Week"

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in November. The national week, even though it has given national periodicals a hook on which to hang some very good articles, has been carried beyond the point of effectiveness with the results that very little attention is given to any of their efforts unless large sums of money are available to pay for the commercial space.

Therefore, as the National Book Council and ALA have suggested, that rather than celebrate a week with a spurt of concentrated and contrived effort, a state-level committee should be established for public relations and publicity that can work over the year to produce quality materials to promote libraries and librarianship in general; and that librarians strive independently for maximum coverage by local news media, and jointly for better understanding of all libraries in our area. We should know our library neighbors and work for greater utilization of all materials and publicity.

Thus National Library Week might become the year-long publicity campaign that we of the NLW committees have tried to make it, and all librarians and libraries would be involved in the year-round promotion of what we do, who we are, and what we need to do the job that is a way of life. Now that we have just observed another NLW, let us start working for a full year of publicity rather than for one week next April.
