

Ventura County Libraries: A Resource for All

by Ventura County Supervisor Linda Parks, October 2009

There is nothing like the satisfaction of reading a good book. Books we've read throughout our lives make lasting impressions, and our ability to access books through public libraries is a hallmark of our society. Free public libraries are society's recognition of the importance of the written word and of our need to access knowledge.

As we become a more computer literate society, libraries are incorporating electronic media into the services they offer. For example, the Ventura County Library has forty-seven databases available to the public on everything from health to law, business to demographic information. Some of the highlights are the Chilton's database that provides in-depth repair information for all makes of cars; Learning Express Library that allows users to practice taking standardized tests such as the SAT, GRE, GED, the firefighters', nurses' and many other professional and educational tests; LegalForms which allows you to download legal forms such as leases, quitclaims, medical authorizations, living wills, etc; BusinessDecision, a wonderful tool for small and medium-sized business owners that provides household, market segmentation and demographic data; Science Online which is great for finding science fair experiments; and Ancestry which provides an incredible wealth of genealogy information. These are only a few of the resources available through the County library's website: <http://www.vencolibrary.org/> Additionally there are fourteen library branches residents can visit, including Oak Park, Simi Valley, Camarillo, Ventura and Ojai, and any resident in Ventura County can access its collection.

Our Library Director, Jackie Griffin, noted that earlier this week one of the library staff was showing the Chilton Car repair database to a patron of the library and the patron said he pays \$2,000 a month to have the database at his garage. Now the mechanic can access the database from his computer at his garage and save his company \$24,000 a year.

The Ventura County Library is a resource in many ways, helping schools, government agencies, and small businesses. In addition to the standard story times, lectures, and book clubs, various branches of the Ventura County

Library offer literacy classes, knitting groups for teens and adults, computer skills classes for senior citizens, a homebound program that delivers library materials to assisted living centers, Paws for Reading where children read to therapy dogs, a teen writer's club, and even art classes. Rooms are available for community groups and a homework center has been set up in association with the Boys and Girls Club.

At a time when the Ventura County Library is seeing an increase in patronage and circulation, and a doubling in the use of its computers for the public, we are also experiencing a significant loss in revenue. The State has just taken \$350,000 in property tax that was to go to our County Library, and will be "borrowing" another \$680,000 this year. Many cities and counties throughout California are forced to contribute more of their funds to keep their libraries running, while some without other funding sources are closing libraries or reducing hours.

While keeping our libraries open and free to the public can be challenging, new services and partnerships are increasing their viability. As more residents discover the helpful resources at our local libraries and become patrons, there will be more funding (as some tax dollars for libraries are proportional to patronage), more support for library services (as more people volunteer and get involved), and a more knowledgeable society (as we reap the benefits of the information we receive there)!