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## Editorial

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*Eugene Public Library*

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# Editorial

Though caught up with the rest of the nation in the drama, angst, and soul-searching that followed 9-11 and the subsequent anthrax scares, Oregon libraries and librarians survived the challenges of the last six months with less radical life-wrenching change than we've seen elsewhere. We've had fewer dramatic career moves, divorces, and other extreme changes. Many individuals I've talked to have expressed a renewed commitment to the purpose of their profession.

In part, this is because librarians and library users have the habit of information. When we face something unknown, we want to learn about it, to understand it, and we have at hand the tools to do so. Information helps us manage our fear of the unknown by making at least part of it known. Literature makes its contribution as well. Fiction writers and readers are constantly exploring ways to discover patterns in life and to create meaning from pain.

In the context of the 9-11 attack upon our society, we can better appreciate the enduring value of libraries. Words connect, share, and inform; the written word connects over the barriers of cultures, distances, and time, extending ideas even beyond death. Libraries, as collections of writings (in whatever format), embody these collective thoughts and memories of our society. Libraries, then, become the tool, the prism through which to reexamine ourselves, our culture, and our professions, to prove that life might be, as Emerson would propose, "worth living."

Senator Mark O. Hatfield, as he dedicated the new Silver Falls Library building in 1997, spoke eloquently of the library's role in preserving culture. He cited several examples of attacks during war or genocide campaigns when the deliberate destruction of libraries was undertaken so as to attack a tangible essence of an enemy culture. I was reminded of his remarks in the aftermath of 9-11 as we struggled, as a nation, as individuals, and as a profession, to make meaning of our world. Those terrorist acts were a limited, insidious sneak-attack on symbolic targets. At best, they have inspired a new perspective. They have also prompted in response, as Faye Chadwell's essay makes clear, a symbolic war, where one of the greater dangers to our culture becomes our own loss of balance and perspective as we respond.

Finding practical, real-life balance between two valid and opposing principles is a lot of what the librarian's job is about. We have to find the balance for our community between providing public access to materials and providing care and protection of those same materials from those that would misuse and abuse them. We have to find the balance, as Cindy Gibbon points out in her essay on library security, between providing public open space and ensuring the safety of that space for library users and staff. We are constantly challenged by individuals who ask for special treatment from the library—waiving of fines, purchase requests for special interests, or even to buy (or steal) a favorite

library item—which we must balance against the needs of the many who provide our public funding. In our Internet access policies, we attempt to find the best balance for our communities between the principle of intellectual freedom and the community's responsibility to protect its children.

I have requested two types of contributions in this issue. The first type asks various artists to reflect on the value of libraries in light of the events of 9-11. Each artist has a special connection and understanding of libraries—Ann Altman is a longtime library supporter, Dennis Zelmer, Claire Ribaud, and Bonnie Hirsch all currently work in libraries, and octogenarian newspaper columnist Henrietta Hay retired after many years at the Mesa County Library District in Colorado. The other type of contribution looks at OLA's Vision 2010 and other library plans and preparations in light of the challenges of 9-11. Michael Eisenberg, Gibbon, and Chadwell discuss planning, security, and intellectual freedom respectively. OLA Past President Anne Van Sickle's essay on the enduring value of libraries is an excellent summation of what I asked for from these talented contributors.

It is when we are caught up in a flood of change, particularly a rapid, frightening change, that we clearly see and grasp the lifeboats of our enduring and essential values to keep us afloat. Dave Frohnmayer's essay challenges us to choose to become the leaders our profession needs. We have our sights set on a future for Oregon libraries; our challenge now is to steer a flexible course to reach our goals.

—Connie J. Bennett  
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*Guest Editor*