



AT THE LIBRARY

By Julie Winkelstein
August 27, 2004

“The Peninsula Library System strengthens local libraries, through cooperation, enabling them to provide better service to their diverse communities.”

-Mission Statement,
Peninsula Library System,
adopted February 7, 1989

A few weeks ago, a friend described her experience of returning a library video to the wrong library system. When she figured out what she had done, she talked to staff at both libraries and was told that, eventually, the video would probably show up at the right place. If not, there would be a charge for replacing it. What she wanted to know from me was: Is there a system in place for this kind of mistake? And how does it work?

The answer is that, yes, there is a system – of sorts, depending on where the book started and where it ends up. If the two libraries are part of BALIS (Bay Area Library and Information Services), it is pretty simple: The book is tagged and sent on to the home library. Whether or not fines will be accruing while it’s making its way depends on the library system and possibly even the person sending it on.

If it’s a school book, it will be returned, although how

it gets there depends on the library and the school system. In Albany, a parent picks them up on her way through and delivers them to the school.

Why does this happen? Cooperating is a good idea for libraries, for all sorts of reasons. Being part of BALIS (www.baylibraries.org) means those libraries, which include 8 library systems in the Bay Area, can work together. They can put on joint campaigns, such as the recent Library Week campaign. They can also provide education and staff development activities for library employees. By working together, they can combine the expertise and resources of the member libraries, in a time when many libraries are struggling for funds.

The Peninsula Library System is an even larger organization, made up of 34 public and community college libraries. In addition to these member libraries, they also work with BALIS and other

cooperative library systems. Their strategic plan focuses on their “commitment to coordinating as many library services as possible, thereby allowing local libraries to focus scarce resources on unique local services” (Peninsula Library System, strategic plan 2004-2007, draft). These systems can also work together on legislation and public awareness, a great benefit in areas like the Children’s Internet Protection Act (CIPA).

Another advantage of cooperation among libraries is that bringing together different types of libraries means representatives of these systems will have an opportunity to find out more about each other’s challenges and daily workings.

LINK+ is another good example of library cooperation. This group of California public and academic libraries provides a wonderful resource that has greatly expanded the offerings

of the member libraries. The Alameda County Library was the first public library to join this system and, as a librarian in that system, I can say it has been an incredible asset.

LINK+ is easy to use: When library users can’t find a particular book in their own library system, they can then search the LINK+ database. If the item is available, a request can be made, and the material is delivered to the local branch within a few days. This service is free, although the fines and replacement costs can be high, and fast. One of the greatest advantages to LINK+ is the combination of academic and public libraries. College students and faculty have access to popular reading materials and public library users have access to academic ones.

This system, like all of the cooperative library programs, benefits everyone – the library user, most of all.