



## AT THE LIBRARY

By Julie Winkelstein  
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***“Libraries provide the free exchange of information and ideas in over 16,000 public libraries nationwide. Libraries are ideal hosts for community events to connect and engage neighbors across the country.”***

-From the September Project website

Years ago, the Alameda County Bookmobile drove in the Solano Stroll parade and then parked in front of the library. I used to work on the Bookmobile, and I loved being there to show local library users this other branch. Children, in particular, seemed to enjoy climbing the steps, walking past the driver and browsing the collection of picture books and easy readers.

These days the Albany Library, like Berkeley Public Library, has a table at the Solano Stroll and some sort of display or activity. For passers-by, this can be a good opportunity to say hello to staff members, pick up brochures on library services and buy some used paperback books. This year, it is also a chance to say goodbye to the popular and well-known Albany Library children’s librarian, Paul Rockwell. Although he will be officially retired by the time of the Stroll, he is making one last appearance there.

Having the local libraries involved in such a community-oriented event is a good example of the way in which a library is an integral part of the community. Libraries don’t only share resources with each other, they also contribute to their community in numerous ways.

Some libraries sponsor Adult Literacy or Families for Literacy programs, reaching out to those in the community who need help with their reading or writing. Some do joint programs with the local schools, like hosting poetry slams or giving extra credit for participation in a library program. Berkeley Public Library recently began a program in which Berkeley Art Museum passes can be checked-out, just like a book. This seems like a wonderful way for two city organizations to work together.

The Albany Youth Task Force is another example; this task force brings together community agencies that deal

with the young people of Albany. It includes the library, the YMCA, the Albany Village, the city, the police department, the school district and other groups, such as the Albany Police Activities League (APAL).

I did a little research on the role of public libraries in communities, and I came across several interesting articles. One, called “The Spirit of An Age: Iowa Public Libraries as solutions to society’s problems, 1890-1940” by Daniel Goldstein, says: “This essay...demonstrates that the success of the Iowa library movement at this time resulted from Iowans’ belief that libraries were the best institutions to address the problems of public vice, especially drinking, gambling and prostitution.” Now there is a big responsibility!

I also found a site for The September Project ([www.theSeptemberProject.org](http://www.theSeptemberProject.org)) which will take place on September 11,

2004, at libraries across the nation. The goal of this project is to provide a chance for people to “share and discuss your ideas about democracy, citizenship, and patriotism through public talks, roundtables, and performances.” In the project overview, the role of public libraries is described: “Public libraries are perfect places for such events: they are free, they are open to the public, and they are distributed nationally....”

The website also provides a map of the public libraries that are participating in this project. When I looked to see which California libraries are involved, I found the nearest ones are Santa Cruz, Sonoma County and the Alameda County Youth Literacy Program at Juvenile Hall.

I love the idea that our country and our communities can be linked by its public libraries. There are so many

ways we differ - geographically, economically, politically - it is wonderful to have something we all can share and value.