



## AT THE LIBRARY

By Julie Winkelstein  
June 20, 2008

*“This room is named in honor of Edith Stone (1888-1984), longtime Albany resident who was an avid reader and lifelong library patron. She left her estate to the Albany Library, in the hope that generations would learn the same love of reading that had so enriched her life.”*

-From Albany Library  
plaque

I recently received an email about a frugal librarian – Carol Sue Snowden – who, when she died at 57, left more than a million dollars to her local public and school libraries. In addition, she left \$10,000 to libraries she used growing up, including her grade school, high school and local libraries. The June 14 *Columbia Dispatch* story ([www.dispatch.com](http://www.dispatch.com)) described her friends and colleagues as “stunned to learn that she was a millionaire.”

I found more stories about librarians leaving large sums of money to their libraries. Norman Oder’s March 19 *Library Journal* posting describes a \$2 million bequest to the West Hartford Public Library in Connecticut, from 82-year-old Thomas Kilfoil – who worked at the library until he was 79. “It seems fitting to give something back to an institution that gave me so many happy and fulfilling years,” Kilfoil is quoted as saying. And Joan Oleck, writing for *School Library Journal* on December 18, 2007, tells the

story of town librarian Evelyn R. Kmit, who recently left the Williamsburg, Massachusetts Meekins Library \$300,000 to be used “for the promotion of reading among the town’s children.”

There are also many stories about library patrons who have unexpectedly left bequests to their local libraries. The Albany Library has received at least two of these – one from Edith Stone many years ago and one recently from an Albany resident. In both cases, these were people who regularly used the library and appreciated its value as a community institution.

This kind of planned giving is described by William R. Gordon in his *American Libraries* (January 2006) article, “Gifts that Speak Volumes: Shared Values can Lead to Lasting Library Legacies through Planned Giving.” He gives two examples: one a \$1.3 million gift and another, a \$1.2 million one. In both cases, the donors have expressed their preferences for

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how the funds will be used. The first person wanted his money to be used for "special projects, programs, acquisition of materials, building improvements, and services to people with disabilities" – a wide range of topics. The second person wanted all the money to be used for programs and services.

Gordon's article goes on to talk about the importance of planned or deferred giving and to give tips to library leaders who are interested in pursuing

this kind of fundraising. It is a thoughtful and educational article and I learned a lot. He makes one point in particular about the motivation behind this kind of bequest: "Planned giving choices reflect our preferences about what kind of message we would like to leave behind us. We want our legacies to align with values that we

cherished and that we hope will live on beyond us..."

I appreciate this approach. When we are young, we hope the message we leave will be through our work, whether it is paid or volunteer. But as we get older, I think we come to realize there will be life after we are gone, and it's never too late to

make a mark.

Giving to a local public library has the potential to impact thousands of people,

whether it is through buildings, materials, programs or services. When I think of the importance of what librarians do on a daily basis, I can see just how wise these people were. Leaving money to a library has got to be one of the best investments in the future one can make.

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