



## AT THE LIBRARY

By Julie Winkelstein  
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***“The objective of ‘Start with a Story’ is to deliver storytimes, free books and family literacy-related activities to the children, ages birth-12 years, who are waiting with relatives or caregivers during visiting hours at Santa Rita Jail.”***

-From the *Alameda County Library News*, July 2006-June 2007

The wonderful flutist Barbara Siesel recently played in the lobby of the Albany Library. Afterwards, I was talking to Barbara and her husband, Keith Torgan, about performing in public libraries. Together they comprise Flute Sweets and Tickletoons, a duo that entertains children and their families with original music and lyrics by Keith.

We talked about what it is like to perform in so many different venues and what the similarities and differences are. What has been most illuminating for them has been what actually happens in a library. Or, as Keith said, “I never really understood what a librarian’s job is – what they actually do.”

I remembered this comment when, a few days later, I read the Alameda County Library news, a compilation and summary of what happened in the Library between July 2006 and June 2007. This 18-page document gives an overview of the various units, such as Children’s Services and the

Information Technology Unit, as well as reports from each of the eleven branches. What was astounding to me was how much we really have accomplished. Even though I attend monthly Children’s Services meetings and even though all of our events are online in something called EventKeeper, I still didn’t know about many of the activities.

It is also impressive to see the numbers. For instance, in 2006 there were almost 1900 children’s programs and more than 10,000 summer reading game participants – and that doesn’t include the 2,000 teen summer reading game players.

Of course I knew about the programs in Albany, such as the city-wide Albany Reads last year (to be repeated this year) and the celebration of our first Sunday. The Brown Bag Speakers Forum is mentioned, too, as well as the evening book group, the Homework Center and the free Lawyer in the library program. Other branches have a variety of programs,

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including visiting authors, book groups, story hours, and a workshop for children called Computer Guts, which focused on the inner workings of computers.

The Reading for Life/Jail Tutoring Program is mentioned, too, and their pilot program called “Start with a Story.” During the pilot phase of two weekends in January 2007, more than 130 children were served and over 150 books were given away. What a great idea – not only providing a diversion to all those children and caregivers, but also encouraging reading, which in turn promotes reading skills and a love of books.

Over all, the Alameda County Library News reflects what it is we do every day as librarians. We provide programs and materials and buildings. We get to know our communities and we try our best to show that we are committed to making our cities and towns

and villages even better places to live. Despite the impression that seems impossible to erase, we are not just about books. We provide a free and open gateway to information. How the word “information” is defined depends on the library and the library users. Maybe it will be what an excellent children’s program looks like, maybe it will be a stack of adult mysteries, ready for the adult summer reading game participants, maybe it will be a book or CD or DVD delivered to a homebound senior or maybe it will be access to the Internet.

To answer Keith’s question: all day long I do everything I can to let people know what an amazing resource the public library is and then I work toward making it just that.