



AT THE LIBRARY

By Julie Winkelstein
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“Skyrocketing library use is causing our already under-funded library system to deteriorate rapidly. A recent study by the California State Library identified more than 500 public library building projects needed statewide, over the next five years.”

-From “Yes on Prop.81,”
yesforlibraries.com

Despite the fact that I work in a library, I knew little about Proposition 81 until I started to research it for this column. Perhaps this is partly because a local measure, Measure G, has gotten much of my attention. This measure is about increasing revenue for my library, in my town. If it passes, it will mean more open hours for Albany - including Sundays - and will also mean a reliable and ongoing source of funds so Albany residents can continue to enjoy their very popular library.

But Proposition 81 is a completely different matter. It follows the much-needed Proposition 14 in 2000, which provided \$350 million in bond funds and helped fund 45 projects. However, due to lack of money, many projects didn't get funded. Proposition 81 would make it possible for more libraries to be either built or renovated, because - despite some recent predictions that libraries and books will become

obsolete - people are using their public libraries more and more. I know that every day, just before we open, there are people in the lobby, checking their watches, tapping their feet and waiting for those doors to swing wide. We are busy, day in and day out, and it is exciting to see the many ways we serve our public.

One interesting aspect of Proposition 81 is the emphasis on what are called “joint use” projects. These projects encourage public libraries to work cooperatively with local schools, county offices of education, community college districts, or a campus of the California State University or the University of California. At least \$25 million of the \$600 million bonds sold will be set aside for these, with the local library and the local education institution sharing the required 35% of the cost. Because of this section of the proposition, much emphasis has been placed on the opportunity to address literacy and

educational issues in a local area.

The longer I work in public libraries, the more I see the advantages to working cooperatively with other community agencies. In fact, I think a public library should form small partnerships with as many organizations, groups or individuals as possible. As libraries have expanded their offerings to include Internet access, large meeting rooms, homework centers and a variety of programs for all ages, they draw in a variety of people with a variety of needs. Sharing resources with others can only be good – everyone benefits. So a proposition that encourages this kind of cooperation and provides the funds to support it is a great idea.

In addition, the wording of this proposition emphasizes the educational aspect of a public library: “Public libraries are a vital part of the education

system. They provide resources and services to all residents of California, including preschoolers, out-of-school adults, senior citizens, and those attending schools at all levels” (Proposed Law, Section I, Article 1, 20021a). This sentiment is similar to the one expressed by Andrew Carnegie as long ago as the 1800’s, when he explained his generous support of libraries by pointing out that anyone with the opportunity and motivation can educate themselves – and that a public library can provide just such an opportunity.

And, finally, this proposition – known in the State legislature as SB 1161 – passed easily in both the Senate and the Assembly, in a show of bi-partisan support. In the contentious world of politics, it is wonderful to find something so popular and so worthwhile.