



AT THE LIBRARY

By Julie Winkelstein
December 22, 2006

“Julie, we’re still open! The Mayor launched a campaign to keep us afloat...We were operating on a tight budget, but we ARE OPEN!!”

-Email from Katharine Dixon, in response to December 15th column (and my apologies to Salinas Public Library)

One aspect of my job is setting up the meeting room for various events. This includes making sure the chairs and tables are where they should be – usually with the able and cheerful help of one of the pages. It also means getting any audio-visual equipment ready – a microphone, movie screen, DVD player, projector or laptop computer.

As far as I know, there is no class in library school that prepares future librarians for these kind of practical, hands-on daily requirements. Two weeks ago, when I was trying to remember which cable connected the projector to the laptop, Michelle – that day’s speaker – commented on the varied aspects of my job. It made me stop and think about what I do during the day, besides recommend books to young readers and their parents.

The computer is a large part of my job. I use it to send and receive email, of course. In addition, I use it to create fliers, send out press releases, order

books, do my timesheet, download library forms and write. This means I have to be comfortable with a word processing program (I use Microsoft Word), a graphics program (PrintShop) and an email program (Outlook). And while I use an Apple computer at home, I use a PC at work – so I have to be bilingual, I guess you could say.

Several years ago, I researched digital cameras and helped choose one for my library. Consequently, I take most of the photographs with that camera, and then either send them, save them or print them – which means I need to understand how to do all of those tasks. Each one of them has a learning curve – the software (Photoshop) alone can be challenging. Not to mention crawling behind my CPU to attach the card reader for the camera – since my computer doesn’t have an active USB port on the front of it.

When I started this job, I didn’t really know that much

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about computers, especially PCs. I had barely used email, so I wasn't comfortable attaching a file or figuring out where one downloaded. I had never set up an email distribution list, printed envelopes using my printer, or even changed the settings on my printer. I probably didn't know what any of those meant.

Over time, I have figured them out. I have become as comfortable with right-clicking as I have using the scroll wheel on the mouse. In fact, I can exchange one mouse for another one, as well as disconnecting a computer and reconnecting it again. I can stand behind a library patron and talk him or her through the process of saving a document onto a disk, or downloading a photograph or signing up for a free email account. I always start out by saying I can't promise anything, but that I will try to help - and most of the time, I can.

This is amazing to me. I was a child who liked to figure

out how things work and I am still that way. Yet computers can seem daunting, especially if you don't speak the language - CPU, C-drive, USB port, memory, RAM, hard drive and more. I am motivated by need, though - the daily needs of our library users. If someone wants to set the margins on a résumé, save it on a disk and then send it as an attachment to a job application, I want that person to succeed. It is part of being a modern librarian and I take that seriously.