

Beth: Fall 1984 (The first 12 months)
Slightly edited by Beth 2004.

A community that wants a library can have one. The western fringe of Austin, defined by a school district, created one out of whole cloth. Vital ingredients were a perceived need, a community committed to volunteer work and a strong feeling of "can do".

In May 1983, in answer to a local newspaper article in the *Picayune*, a group of 50 interested people met and created the Westbank Community Library Board. Book donations were requested through the *Picayune*, posters and word of mouth. A request for librarians to sort books produced 11 volunteers. Civic groups, youth groups, strong support from the local school board, a contest at school contributed to a staggering donation in five months of 20,000 books. Excess books, filling three bus loads, were delivered at 6:30 am by three high school civic classes, and sold at a one-day book sale in a shopping center parking lot. Three thousand dollars were raised but more importantly over 100 people participated as volunteers. Enthusiasm and astonishment were high. A flyer in the *Picayune* produced \$10,000 in donations--overwhelmingly from individuals. In June, the Texas Commerce Bank of Barton Creek offered 1200 square feet of space in their new building at no cost for two years. We were off and running.

Unusual features contributed to the library's initial reception. Austin, a booming city, struggled with growing pains. As a result, 10 years ago, the Eanes ISD was established as a separate school system from Austin. Some animosity remained between the two areas. In recent years, Austin established an annual library fee for all who lived outside the city limits. By 1983, a library card for an individual cost \$24. Initial meetings with the city librarian to establish a branch library in the Westbank were nonproductive, as were attempts to form a cooperative library. With a population of 20,000 that is both educated and affluent, the Westbank was more than ready for a library.

In any such undertaking there are problems -- some serious and others ludicrous. The number of book donations was staggering. Librarians sorted books four nights a week, but couldn't keep up with the flow of donations. Storage was a problem. Differences in ways of doing things, style and final goals were frequent. "Old" Westbank, a long established rural, individualistic group, encountered "new" Westbank, an affluent, mobile group of new residents. Influential, wealthy, highly respected, strong-willed people abounded. An evening gala at \$50 per person was disappointing. People perceived the event as snobbish. Funding was, is and probably always will be a problem. The library falls in five government taxing jurisdictions-Austin, Rollingwood, Westlake Hills, Travis County and the Eanes ISD and no one wanted fiscal responsibility.

The WCL had books, space and in November hired a professional librarian for twenty hours a week. The librarian's two strongest points are organization and the ability to get along with all types of people, which turned out to be a good thing. The library now consisted of a room with a large stack of boxes filled with an unknown number of books, 15 potential volunteers and a Board that wanted to open on Jan. 1. In the first few weeks, a master plan (frequently amended) was made, supplies were ordered and a few volunteers began to come by -- some for thirty minutes, others for two hours.

Our next miracle took the form of a \$23,600 grant from the Lola B Wright Foundation to be used for furniture and a core reference collection. Since we had applied for only one

grant to date, did not have a knowledgeable grant writer, and had not even opened our doors, we were astounded and ecstatic.

Furniture normally requires a three-month delivery time -- once selections have been made. Texwood, a national library furniture manufacturer is located in Austin. A local business, Calcasieu, allowed us to buy the Texwood furniture at cost. In a race against time, orders needed to be placed by November 15th for a January 1st delivery date. Steel shelving was also ordered. The librarian learned a great deal about furniture in two weeks.

The first week in January, the UPS man and librarian carried in 137 boxes of steel furniture and two days later the Texwood furniture arrived. Imagine 5000 books, all the furniture and 20 people in 1200 square feet as we assembled the shelving.

Meanwhile we had started to catalog books. We had three sections of garage style steel shelves and 5000 books to process. The master plan was amended and amended. Because the books were highly selective and overwhelmingly published within the last five years, the librarian expected to receive a high percentage of catalog card kits from Baker and Taylor. Disappointingly only 30% of the orders were filled and those after a six-week delay. Since a March 1st opening had been firmly established, original cataloging was done on all children's books. Select volunteers were taught cataloging for juvenile fiction and picture books.

The Westbank now had a common denominator that appealed to all ages and types of people. The corp of volunteers had grown steadily -- 30 to 40 volunteers worked every week, some at random, others on an established days. An average of 50 books a day were still being donated. The logistics of separating processed, unprocessed, cataloged, original cataloging, books for future sales, books for which card sets had been ordered and books for which card sets were not available were staggering. Fortunately the volunteers were intelligent, concerned and overwhelmingly had a good sense of humor.

By March 1st, at what then seemed a snail's pace, 2000 books were processed. In retrospect, a great deal had been accomplished. We decided to have an opening preview party. Fifty people were expected, including the library board and volunteers. Incredibly over 400 people came. Seventy-five dozen cookies, a huge sheet cake and a hundred helium balloons vanished. We were extremely pleased by a weekly attendance of 44 patrons. Jan Gibson offered a popular weekly storytime for preschoolers.

In the early spring, the WCL applied and was accepted for membership in the Central Texas Library System, an umbrella organization of public libraries in central Texas. Acceptance hinged, not on the number or quality of books; the librarian; the building or site, but on whether or not \$1 annual funding from the city of Rollingwood counted as government funding.

The benefits of joining CTLS were many --interlibrary loan privileges with libraries in the Southwest; access to collections of 16 mm film and large print books; collection development; assistance with publicity; and funding based on our materials budget.

In April, the Friends of the WCL were formed. Sue Cline, as the first president, brought organizational skills and enthusiasm to the job. By the end of the summer, the Friends

had raised \$3500; organized a book sale; hosted a party for the summer Junior Volunteers; and sponsored the Summer Reading Program.

Throughout the spring, the community continued to support the library with generosity and goodwill. A local bookstore, Harmony House, donated \$10,000 worth of new books and paperback shelves. U.S. Representative Jake Pickle was instrumental in having the Library of Congress send us eighteen boxes of used books. Cris Faught Insurance donated liability insurance. The CPA firm of Seidman and Seidman provided ongoing financial advice. Jim Greenwood created catalog cards by the thousands with his computer/printer. The *Picayune* ran weekly articles about the developing library. A complimentary advertisement for a volunteer assistant librarian produced Louise Windisch, who 16 hours a week from May through August! The Board was able to increase the librarian's hours to 30 hours a week. Numerous contacts were made to locate a temporary or permanent site for the library. Walter Vackar offered a highly visible site in the heart of a large retail development. Because of neighborhood dismay at the overall development and later a misunderstanding, the site was ultimately deeded to the city of Austin for a library. The Dunham family donated a copy machine. A local café, the Blue Moon, donated \$1 for each person that ate at the new restaurant. Meanwhile fifty books a day continued to pour in.

By September 1st, 6000 hours of time had been donated. The corp of volunteers continued to grow. Library patrons walked up and offered their time. Martha Hudson coordinated and contacted other possible sources. People enjoyed the time that they spent at the library. Problems were minimal. The librarian learned many practical lessons about delegation and time management. Ultimately the librarian dealt only with problems in processing rather than day-to-day supervision. Since 900 to a 1000 books were being processed each month, this was no small feat.

With the start of summer, daily attendance rose from 44 people a day to 71. The Summer Reading Program, headed by Cheryl O' Connor, was an outstanding success. Over 300 children registered for the program and 130 finished the mandatory 10 books for a completion certificate. Interest was stimulated by flyers, posters, classroom visits, magic workshops, riddle games, bulletin boards, and a party with a magician at the close of the summer.

Junior volunteers, teenagers thirteen to sixteen years old, worked three-hour shifts throughout the summer. The teenagers staffed the circulation desk; dealt with the mechanics of the Summer Reading Program; offered enthusiastic reader's advisory service to children; and shelved books. The JV's worked once a week and the librarian learned to limit two teens to a shift. At the end of the summer, letters of recommendation were sent and the Friends gave a swimming party.

By the fall, the Library Board and the librarian knew they had a tiger by the tail. Massive processing of materials continued; books were still being donated by the box full; sites, grants, funding options abounded; volunteers volunteered; the library hours were extended from 36½ hours a week to 42½, including bimonthly Saturday hours. Library Board meetings lasted two hours and covered extensive informational reports. Publicity was created at all levels. Still there were many projects not complete or partially complete. We needed more developer contacts; a serious fundraising campaign for operating and building funds; greater numbers of adult patrons; the time to make presentations to businesses, community and governmental groups; the energy to begin

formulating ideas for a new library; and the very real need to establish a five-year plan with priorities. We had learned that if we could justify our need to the people, the community would back us through time, money, and goodwill.

We now provided resources of 8000 books, 60 current periodicals, a limited tape collection, interlibrary loan privileges, films, large print books, a 16mm projector and screen, 2 Polaroid cameras, pamphlets and a reference collection. Publicity to inform the community about the library included installation of a library sign on the street; 10,000 flyers distributed through Tom Thumb aimed at adult readers; newspaper articles; presentations to various clubs; a letter of library services distributed to all Eanes teachers, as well as conventional publicity. As we headed into fall, a healthy start was made at resolving major issues. The Library Board was working on establishing major goals; an Advisory Council of community leaders and influential business people was formed; a slide show was assembled for presentations; considerable work was done to put together a booklet about the library; and efforts were being made to organize a major fund drive.