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Libraries and Local Economies - Jobs, Retraining and Career Opportunities

The economy, whether at the federal, regional, state, or local community level, has attracted the attention of every one of us. During the 1970s in Indiana, librarians were confronted with static budgets and rising costs, testing their ingenuity and creativity. The reality of hard times for the nation's and the state's workforce arrived several years later during the recession of the early 1980s. Displacement and dislocation of blue and white collar employees was devastating, as unemployment reached 20 percent levels. Society's free institution, the public library, accepted its social responsibility and attempted to provide informational services to meet the needs of patrons whose status as productive members of the society was challenged when they were forced into the ranks of the unemployed and/or underemployed.

In this issue, the efforts and programs of five Indiana public libraries illustrate the commitment of librarianship to its social responsibilities.

Douglas Raber discusses programs implemented at Monroe County Public Library and attempts to place the public library into its true context within a community. Raber not only acknowledges the importance of accountability but also realizes the importance of perfecting our terminology so that abstractions can be translated into activities which members of the community can observe, appreciate, and support. In "Needs, Politics and Public Libraries: The Challenge of the 1980s," Raber identifies the manner in which Monroe County Public Library approached the problems of its constituency during the period of recent economic hardship.

Harold C. Ogg focuses upon "The Unemployed Worker as a Patron in the Public Library—A Study in Outreach" in our second article. Ogg outlines ten issues, "truths," that librarians must consider, especially those professionals who desire to wander into outreach services with an understanding of what may lie ahead.

One program developed by the Social Sciences Division, Indianapolis—Marion County Public Library, is detailed by Lois R. Laube and Marily Genter in "Looking for a Better Future: An Educational Opportunities Program Presented by the Indianapolis—Marion County Public Library, Social Sciences Division, November 12, 1983." The narration provided by Laube and Genter indicates the time and effort demanded to ensure a successful, first program. This teaching and learning experience should guarantee future successful programming.

When La Porte's Allis Chalmers and American Home Foods plants closed, the public library assisted both employers and job hunters. Judy Hamilton Averitt explains the activities of the public library in the "The Library and the Local Economy: La Porte County Public Library." Averitt shares some of the library's feedback from employers and job hunters with readers. Members of the community appreciate timely efforts, and librarians need such communiques.

Beth Ann Kroehler describes the many endeavors undertaken by Muncie Public Library in "Jobs, Careers, Occupations—MPL Assists the Local Community." All libraries hopefully emulate the Muncie approach: constant evaluation, constant change, and constant exploration of "new ways to meet the job information needs of . . . its citizens."

The narratives of the foregoing authors demonstrate that public libraries respond to community needs. The theme of this issue, "Libraries and Local Economics—Jobs, Retraining and Career Opportunities," should be assessed frequently. Economic recession, displacement, and dislocation should not be the motivating factors for every program initiated by librarians in this area of activity.

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