

The Story of the Nelson Public Library: 1986 to 2013 (Uncondensed Version)

by Eileen Holland

At the Top of the Staircase

It was 1986. As always, the climb up the stairs to the Nelson Municipal Library bothered Librarian Bonnie Sullivan. Since starting at the Library in 1978, Sullivan had viewed the steep cement staircase to the second floor of the Civic Centre as a barrier, keeping seniors, the physically challenged, and mothers with children in strollers at bay. Sullivan could hardly believe the Library still occupied the premises to which it had been “temporarily” relegated in 1937, from the entrance, foyer and lobby of the Capitol Theatre. The West Kootenay Library fell short in other ways. Building the collection was impossible with the Library at half the recommended size for a city of 9200 people. Its stacks were awkwardly arranged, its lighting was poor, and it had limited seating. Worse yet, the building leaked badly, and did not meet fire and building standards.

Nelson Municipal Library desperately needed a new home. In 1986, the Nelson Municipal Library Board focused on three areas that demanded change. They commissioned a study regarding the feasibility of relocating the Library, as well as creating and financing a Regional Library¹ to serve Nelson and Areas E, F, and defined H. The third concern revolved around handing the management of the David Thompson University Centre library over to the City.

A setback occurred when the Library Board’s application to receive provincial EXPO legacy funds for a new Library facility went unendorsed by the City of Nelson. The application supported instead was that of the Capitol Theatre Restoration Society. The Board had no choice but to wait, hopeful that the Library would be the next project to gain support from City Hall.

A Library Action Committee was formed and a campaign started. The possibility of holding a referendum was discussed. In a December 8th, 1987 article in the Nelson Daily News, Mayor-elect Gerald Rotering doubted the success of a referendum if Nelson took the weight of the costs of a new library on its own. Nelson taxpayers were sure to balk at paying an average of \$50 more for library services. Area E, F and H voters would need to approve a tax increase of approximately 69 cents per \$1000 of assessed property value, or \$34 for a property valued at \$50,000. This taxation would bring the Library \$450,000 annually in operation and maintenance costs.

If Balfour-Blewett and North Shore-South Slokan areas joined the City, the Library would benefit from a provincial government per-capita grant. As the per-capita grant was larger for

¹ The term *Regional Library* was used in the ‘80s when referring to a library that served the residents of the region, although it was technically a *District library*; in later years, *Regional Library* meant a collaboration between a number of municipalities to offer library service, with a headquarters generally based in the largest municipality.

rural populations, incorporating the rural areas in Nelson's service area would more than double the book grant already received.

On November 19, 1988, the residents of Nelson and Areas E, F and H (Enterprise Creek south) went to referendum on a Regional Library. In preparation, the Library Action Committee launched a vigorous campaign. Posters and brochures extolled the benefits of a Regional Library. The Friends of the Nelson Municipal Library recruited volunteers to spread the word about the significance of this referendum. Officially a charitable organization since 1983, the Friends became a driving force in the quest to establish a Nelson and District Library. The executive directors of the Friends in 1988-1989 were Frances Welwood, Betty Daniel, John Spratley, Evelyn Darraugh, Kay Stewart, Esther McParlon and Hazel Street.

The Library Action Committee examined three options for a new library: construction of a new building, renovation of an existing building, or the leasing of a facility – no buildings with steep stairs! The cover of Sullivan's pamphlet summarizing the Library's 1987 annual report made the current library's deficiencies stunningly clear: "Open to the able-bodied: Monday to Saturday." The former SAAN building at the corner of Hall and Vernon Streets was considered the most suitable site for the new library. The building was wheelchair-friendly, spacious, centrally located and structurally superior.

Popular Book Titles in 1988

Stephen King's *Tommyknockers*,

Farley Mowat's *Virunge*, *The Passion of Dian Fossey*

David Suzuki's *Metamorphosis*

After ten years at Nelson Municipal Library, five of those as chief librarian, Bonnie Sullivan resigned in the spring of 1988. Before she left, Sullivan was outspoken about the coming referendum and the importance of a good library. As stated in the Kootenay Sunday Journal on April 24, 1988, Sullivan and her staff had built up the Library to the point that it was the most heavily-used recreational facility in Nelson. Although 55% of Nelson's residents were card-carrying members, the Library was still squirreled away in the same digs it had occupied for half a century. "Our library is half the size of Grand Forks' library," said Sullivan in an article in the Kootenay Sunday Journal on April 24, 1988 covering her resignation. "And even Fruitvale has a larger space than we do." Sullivan had the foresight to be concerned as the Library moved into the information age, saying, "A library isn't a warehouse for books. You need room for people and programs." Sullivan had too often heard the excuse that residents were unlikely to accept higher taxes for a Regional Library, as the Kootenays were in a depressed era. "These people forget that the Civic Centre was built during the depression of the 1930s," she countered. Sullivan pointed out that 25% of new Library members lived outside of Nelson, and paid \$15.00 per year to borrow books instead of paying taxes toward the Library. Library advocate Frances

Welwood, who lived on Nelson's North Shore, was quoted as saying, "We're getting a free ride compared to people who live in Nelson."

Deb Thomas became the new chief librarian in early April, 1988. Thomas had a degree in English Literature and Creative Writing, and completed further training at McGill Library School. After working in libraries at McGill University, B.C.I.T., S.F.U. and Vancouver Community College, she moved to the Kootenays in 1980. Thomas studied writing at the David Thompson University Centre, then spent seven years as the film and video librarian at Selkirk College in Castlegar. When she accepted the position of head librarian at Nelson Municipal Library, Thomas's wish list included a new library with a children's area, a video/slide viewing room, an expanded staff workplace, public meeting rooms, a public access micro-computer, better reference books, and longer hours. In What's On in November, 1988, Deb Thomas was quick to echo Bonnie Sullivan's parting appeal. "We want a library which is accessible to everyone, the young and old, the abled and disabled," Deb Thomas stressed. "We at the library see it as apple pie and motherhood – it is an essential service and a very vital part of the community."

The Nelson Municipal Library Board was approached regarding shared accommodation within the newly-proposed Leisure Centre building along with an arena, gyms, meeting rooms and recreation rooms. Size and standards made the Leisure Centre an attractive option, but two elements were lacking that could not be compromised: access and location. Several potential library sites below Vernon Street had already been rejected for the same deficiencies. The Library Board again returned to considering the SAAN building/Winter Games office for the Library, with the adjacent lots serving for future Museum and Gallery development. Studies had been done on the building and the price was considered reasonable.

The newspapers were deluged with letters supporting the Regional Library. Simultaneously, a media campaign pleading for citizens to Vote No November 19 flooded local newspapers. Friction occurred between library detractors and library faithfuls, especially in the Areas. A. Malone of area E peppered the Letters and classified sections with reasons to vote against the new library, including this September 28, 1988 comment in The Nelson Daily News: "I would rather have the freedom to choose to pay an even higher fee to the library if I so desire than to be forced to pay for something I may never use on taxes."

Just prior to the referendum, Mayor Gerald Rotering received confirmation that MLA Howard Dirks would support pursuing provincial GO B.C. funds for the Regional Library, which would bring in one third of the funding should the Library win voter endorsement.

As before, there was a concerted community effort to educate the larger community about the benefits of a library in preparation for the referendum. Volunteers living outside the service area worked hard to get the message out to their neighbours, fielding questions and dispelling

myths. Among them was former Library employee and now volunteer, Penny Bonnett. A Blewett resident, Bonnett's hard work and dedication earned her a lifetime library membership in thanks.

As predicted by Library insiders, the November 19th, 1988 Regional Library referendum was defeated. The electoral requirements for a positive outcome were unrealistic, with 50% voter support in all four dissimilar Areas required. The referendum won approval from 72% of Nelson voters, and 63% of Area F's North Shore-Slocan voters. Area H voters in the Slocan Valley (Enterprise Creek south) defeated the referendum 656 to 324. Area E's Balfour-Blewett voters defeated it 626 to 405. Disappointed but unfazed, the supporters of the Regional Library pressed on. They steered their attention toward finding a new home for the Nelson Municipal Library, studying every available building lot and building in Nelson's downtown core.

More Referenda on the Agenda

In participation with Area F and defined Area E, the City of Nelson held a second referendum on April 21, 1990 to authorize the borrowing of up to \$860,000 to fund a Regional Library. It was determined that the Regional District of Central Kootenay (RDCK) should put forth the application for a GO B.C. grant to support this undertaking, the amount requested \$278,000. As in the previous Referendum, all Areas had to vote in favour for it to pass.

Objections to the Nelson and District Library showed up in the newspaper and in a pamphlet circulated around the community. A number of Area F residents and defined Area E residents voiced concerns that they were being treated less fairly than Nelson residents. The Referendum Action Committee assured Area residents that taxation supporting the Library was fair and that representatives from Area F and defined Area E would hold positions on the new Library Board. While the 1988 Referendum had included the area reaching partway up the Slocan Valley and out to Balfour, in 1990 the choice was made to restrict the area. Surveys had shown that people residing farther than a twenty minute drive away found it unreasonable to be taxed for library services.

The Library appealed to the public to consider the expanded services that a new library would bring. There would be microcomputers, fax machines and typewriters available for public use, a viewing and listening room, an online catalogue, after-school programs, literacy and peer tutoring, and a mobile book service—books by request through the expanded outreach service to rural areas.

The SAAN building at the corner of Hall and Vernon Streets was identified for the new Library site. Architectural plans were drawn up, fundraising started, and an operating budget determined. The site was lauded as spacious, centrally located within the downtown core, bus-accessible and wheelchair-friendly. As before, there was a concerted community effort to

educate the larger community about the benefits of a library in preparation for the referendum. Volunteers living outside the service area worked hard to get the message out to their neighbours, fielding questions and dispelling myths. Among them was former Library employee and now volunteer Penny Bonnett. A Blewett resident, Bonnett's hard work and dedication earned her a lifetime library membership in thanks.

The supporters of the new Nelson and District Library had every reason to believe that the second referendum would succeed. Although an overwhelming total vote supported the new Library, their hopes were once again dashed on April 21, 1990. Voters in Area F and defined Area E turned down the Regional Library plan, the greatest opposition coming from the North Shore and Bealby Point-Mountain Station.

The Referendum Action Committee chose to see the defeat not as a vote against the Library, but as a revolt against higher taxes. They refused to abandon their mission to achieve a new Library facility.

Fairbank Architects had researched the suitability of a number of locations for a new Library facility in 1985: the SAAN building on Vernon Street, the Wood/Vallance Building at Baker and Josephine, and the former RCMP building on Stanley Street. In the five years since the initial study, additional library sites were considered, most notably the Horswill/Arcuri building, a lot on the southeast corner of Ward and Victoria Streets, the old Hospital site, the CPR Station House, and the City Parkade (by adding an additional level).

The Wood/Vallance building was rejected due to its location in a prime commercial area, without proper parking facilities. The CPR building, despite its level location, good parking and heritage appeal, was not ideally located. Although the SAAN building had topped the list for quite some time with its level access, the building was mired in legal issues. The former RCMP building had an entranceway that was not totally level with the street, but there was suitable street parking and wheelchair access to three of the four floors. It occupied a good location near Baker Street, boasted 24,000 square feet of usable area, and most importantly, could be purchased without delay. In 1990, the City of Nelson acquired the former RCMP building. The Library would occupy the first and second floors, and the Nelson City Police the third and fourth floors.

After two failed referenda, the Library Board had no choice but to bring non-resident user fees more in line with the contributions of Nelson taxpayers. Deb Thomas said in the Nelson Daily News of May 25th, 1990, 'Rural library supporters who feel the increase is a punishment should remember that, had the referendum been passed, they would have been paying at least these amounts in annual taxation. I do regret the timing, however, for these people in particular. ... It is simply a necessary, and long overdue, equalization.'" No major protests occurred regarding

the new user fees, although several patrons downgraded family memberships (\$28) to adult memberships (\$17). Many non-residents even thought the increase reasonable. Those finding the change financially difficult had the option of purchasing a six-month card or seeking assistance from the Friends of the Library.

Brainwaves

- Early 80's Chief Librarian Eva Walters: Store several pairs of reading glasses at the circulation desk for patron use.
- 1993 Library Board Trustee Norm McCarvell: Place a Friends library bookcase and a donation tin in the Library, offering ongoing book sales.
- 1994 Chief Librarian Deb Thomas: Solve the graffiti problem in the Library washrooms by installing blackboards.
- 2010: Administrative/Technical Services Coordinator Heather Goldik: Provide patrons with great reading ideas by printing themed book lists on the back of the due bookmarks.

In 1990, a financial blow was dealt to Canadian libraries. A federal amendment was tabled stating that libraries could no longer buy directly from the U.S. Instead, books had to be purchased from a Canadian agent. When Thomas sent a letter of complaint to the Federal Government, she was advised that the amendment was meant to improve services in Canada. The higher costs associated with dealing with Canadian agents meant that fewer books could be purchased.

The Board commenced planning for a City-wide referendum to gather support for a new library facility. The referendum wording stipulated that the project could only proceed if GO B.C. funding came through. The original GO B.C. application was revised, requesting \$210,000 for renovations to the former RCMP building. Preliminary architectural studies and a cost analysis of 602 Stanley Street had already been done by Pelman Architects. The overall floor design for 602 Stanley Street came next, with patron input encouraged. Beams and columns were added to make the building structurally sound to support the Library's heavy book stacks. Dr. Nelson Ames of the Central Kootenay Health Unit assessed the building's safety, his only concern being the removal of the bullets from the shooting range.

A Regional Library would ideally include the David Thompson Library (DTL). The David Thompson University Centre Support Society volunteers who had worked in the DTL and kept it going after the university centre closed in 1984 were not consulted on the library's fate, an unfortunate omission. With the City of Nelson's approval, DTL library supporters moved the DTL's rare Kootenaiiana print and microfilm collections to the Nelson Municipal Library, and the archival documents to the Museum, Archives, Art Gallery and Historical Society [MAAG]. The Kootenay Archives Library opened on the lower level of the new Library in 1992. In 1994,

almost 200 boxes of David Thompson Library art books and periodicals which had remained at the DTL site, were relocated to the Kootenay School of the Arts upon the School and City Council's approval.

A fundraising blitz started up with the intention of raising \$100,000 toward furnishings and equipment. In the Kootenay way, many donations came through from foundations, charities, memorial funds and individuals to help the Library meet the needs of its members. A benefit concert was held, and newspaper and radio coverage was ramped up. The Friends encouraged the public to purchase one of the Library's 1500 shelves for \$25.00 to \$50.00, with the donor's names identified on shelf plaques. At a Book'em jail at the Mall, the public paid to put other residents in jail until someone else paid to get them out.

On June 22, 1991, homeowners and resident electors in Nelson voted on a new referendum to show their approval of a new facility shared by the Library and Nelson City Police. Success was finally achieved, with a 70% approval vote. Pelman Architects were hired by the City of Nelson to complete the architectural work, with construction commencing in 1992.

The move from the Civic Centre to 602 Stanley Street took three days. The Library's Premiere Opening on June 25th, 1992 was jointly hosted by Chief Librarian Deb Thomas and Police Chief Ron Brock, and the Kootenay Kilties Pipe Band kicked off the celebration. A ribbon-cutting ceremony and public tours took place the next day, followed by a New Library Celebration and Boogie at the Hume Room of the Heritage Inn. The fledgling library opened to the public for business on July 6th, with a Grand Opening in the fall. "The first day here in the new location we had four times the normal daily usage, although of course it's tapered off a little since then," [said] Chief Librarian Deb Thomas in the West Kootenay Connector of November 26, 1992.

NML Enters the Information Age

The Nelson Municipal Library entered the computer era in 1985 with the startup of its first automated system. Book Track ran on Apple IIe computers without hard drives, all transactions dependent on the switching of floppy disks. It was a tedious process, perhaps even slower than a manual transaction, but improved record-keeping made its use advantageous. In 1987, the Library changed to the fully text-based Cranbrook Library System. It did not use standardized MARC records for its data, and ran on dumb terminals (with limited processing capability) connected remotely to a server at City Hall. The province provided the first personal computer in 1989 for Interlibrary Loans. The office manager put the new PC to good use, modernizing her tasks.

Automation gained momentum in the early '90s. An office computer and a circulation computer were purchased. A third computer featuring a CD-ROM, an atlas and an encyclopedia was donated for public use when the new Library opened.

Automation updates, collection expansion, and the additional staffing necessary to run and maintain the new facility were expenses that became worrisome in the months following the move. A fall in revenue due to the closure of the library prior to the Grand Opening created a further setback, along with higher janitorial, electrical and group insurance costs. The Children's Library, slated for completion by 1995, perched on the financial horizon. The Library reeled from a 25% increase in the use of the children's department. 280 children, up 172 children from 1991, read 2000 books during the 1992 summer reading program. A puppet theatre donated by the 1993 grads of LVR made the program even more popular. By year's end, the Library was feeling the impact of a \$12,000 budget shortfall. Opening the Library an hour later each day relieved some of the financial pressure, allowing the regular staff to perform the duties of casuals without the associated costs. After lengthy budget adjustments, the new Library's remaining operating deficit was assumed by City Council.

With the approval of City Council, the roughing-in of the basement began. The Friends offered some of their children's shelving funds for basement renovations, the funds replenished by renting out the basement area at \$5.00 an hour. By 1994, the rent had risen to \$7.50 an hour for non-commercial groups and \$12.50 an hour for commercial groups.

Interlibrary Loan activity increased so dramatically that the Library could no longer afford the resulting staff time or postage costs. In 1992, 520 loans were made to other libraries, a substantial jump from 102 in 1991. Chief Librarian Thomas expressed concern that mailing books to non-residents undercut the dollars available for Library funding. The service was shut down temporarily in 1993 until the decision was made to add a 50 cent postage fee, with the support of most of the patrons using the program.

In late 1993, the Library Board's Automation Committee focused in on whether to purchase a microcomputer or a main-frame. The upgrading of the system would take five years. Evaluations of three main-frame systems—Dynix, Multilis, or Geac—were completed, with Dynix making the best impression. JES Ulysis, Athena, and L4U were other systems researched in the mid-'90s. Grants were available to offset the costs related to upgrading the Library system. In the Kootenay way, many other local groups and individuals came through with donations to help the Library meet the needs of its patrons. Without these sources of funding, the technological advancement and automation of the Library could not have occurred anywhere near as swiftly.

A Nelson and Area Community Archives Task Force was formed with the cooperation of the Nelson Municipal Library Board. Under the sponsorship of the Kootenay Museum Association and Historical Society, the Task Force applied to the BC government for a grant to develop community archives.

A goal for 1994 was a West Kootenay Freenet. The introduction of the internet to the Library was an expensive venture at \$100 a month plus \$200 for software. Nelson Municipal Library was the first library in the Kootenays to have public internet. Chief Librarian Deb Thomas had been concerned for some time about the money and staff time spent on producing and filing catalogue cards. Thomas moved forward on the purchase of an online access catalogue to rectify the situation.

An Open House held in 1995 introduced the public to the new online public access catalogue, the internet, and the CD-ROM. One-on-one internet tutoring by volunteers increased the digital literacy of Library patrons. When email arrived, Library patrons quickly embraced the new technology. In 1996, the province offered grants and staff training to ensure that every library could have internet access. Nelson Municipal Library offered to host one of the regional training programs.

A proposal was put forward to both Municipal Affairs and the Library Services Branch suggesting to the provincial government that a federation of 'sharing services' between Kootenay Boundary and Central Kootenay libraries be encouraged. Benefits included cut rates in cataloguing, joint buying of books and supplies, and consortium purchasing. Reciprocal borrowing was a further benefit, allowing a resident in Winlaw to borrow from Grand Forks or Castlegar. Sharing would occur via faxes or a central database. The two Regional Districts would work together to establish funding and a central office.

CANCOPY, a not-for-profit organization founded by Canadian writers and publishers to control reproduction rights, requested that a survey be done in public libraries to establish how many photocopies were made from books. This ensured that a percentage of monies received would reach authors, lyricists, and others creators in the field. While CANCOPY had already developed agreements with school and academic libraries, public libraries were more complicated as most photocopying occurred at self-serve coin-operated machines. The Director of the Library Services Branch negotiated on behalf of B.C.'s libraries, and once an agreement had been reached, the province coordinated payments. Nelson Municipal Library's contribution amounted to \$150 a year.

In 1995, the Library again faced a substantial budget deficit. Casual staff faced cutbacks. Periodicals were not renewed. The increased demand for services, the costs of operating a

larger facility, and the subsequent years of lean budgets brought about the deficit. After City negotiations with Areas E, F and H, all four contributed funds to reduce the deficit.

Friends of the Library Fundraising: 1995-1998

The Friends of the Library was incorporated as a charitable organization in 1983 with the staunch support of Library-promoters such as Elizabeth Wallach and Frances Welwood. The Friends work tirelessly behind the scenes to promote NML and keep the Library progressive and multi-faceted. Such activities include the co-ordination of applications for grants, and memorable fundraising events, such as:

- Yearly: The Friends of the Library Fall Book Sale: A much-anticipated treat for Nelson's avid readers, attendees exit the sale juggling stacks of books purchased at a trifling cost.
- 1995: Playhouse Raffle: A July 1st raffle at Lakeside Park raised \$3650 to help purchase the CD-ROM and other automation.
- 1996: "A Taste of the Kootenays": This raffle featured a basket of quality items from local businesses. It brought in \$750 in donations (for a matching grant) to purchase CD-ROMs.
- 1997: Celebrity Book Auction – Books of the Rich and Famous: Favourite books of famous people were auctioned off at a wine and cheese party. A profit of \$3400 was divided between the Library and their co-sponsor, the Red Cross.
- 1998: The Incredible Shrinking Tea Party: An initial tea party was held. Those eight people each hosted a party, inviting seven friends who in turn held their own parties and invited six people, continuing on until each party shrank to one guest. Participants donated \$5.00 or more, the \$8000 profit funding automation.

The Automated Library

In 1996, the conversion of the automated records to a standardized format took a sizeable bite out of the Library budget. A system handling circulation, cataloguing, acquisitions and a public access catalogue cost thousands more. The Library computers, both those used by the staff and by the public, needed constant upgrading or replacement by the City, or through grants and donations.

An automation funding crisis occurred in 1997, when the Library Board decided to purchase the Dynix automated system at a cost of \$123,000. Upon discovering that financing they had believed to be a capital grant was instead a loan, the realization hit Thomas and the Board that they would need to borrow over \$100,000 for automation. Uncertain as to whether they had sufficient funds to purchase Dynix, they found themselves stalled, reluctant to sign the contract.

In 1997, Nelson Municipal Library Board and the chief librarian distributed a pamphlet prior to the local elections informing the public that the Library was not supported by areas E, F and H

through taxation or annual grants-in-aid. In 1998, Mayor Exner asked the Nelson Municipal Library Board to acquaint Areas E, F and H with options regarding regional participation in the Library. Board representatives, the Chief Librarian and other regional supporters discussed the issue at a meeting of the Regional District of the Central Kootenay. As only the Area F Director attended the meeting, the Board presented a written proposal to the Area E, F and H directors. No response was received.

The Nelson Municipal Library was asked to pay \$2.35 a book for cataloguing and processing after the provincial government cancelled the Library Services Branch's Acquisition Program in 1995. The formation of a consortium of West Kootenay libraries seemed increasingly desirable in an effort to reduce costs by purchasing in bulk.

In 1998, the front desk terminal was replaced by a DELL personal computer capable of providing staff with internet reference access. Thomas purchased a zip drive to back up settings on the Library's public computers and reload settings when complications occurred. Deb Thomas submitted a proposal to the Gates Foundation and the \$8500 grant received provided a faster internet connection, a new computer, software, and a laser printer. The internet computers were shut down for two weeks to register users and install a security system in order to address problems with patrons tampering with the computers. The new system helped trace those repeated and deliberately damaging equipment, who were subsequently banned from using the internet. Library internet cards were issued. Youths aged eleven to fourteen required a parent's signature to use the internet, while those ten and under needed to be accompanied by a parent.

A number of companies had leased or rented the basement room of the Library since the space was roughed-in. The Kootenay School of the Arts, Kootenay Internet Communication Society and Westel had all held lengthy leases. The decision was made to use the Westel lease fees to finance a new automation system.

After years of researching new automation systems, Chief Librarian Deb Thomas narrowed down her focus to L4U. Other automated systems had been investigated but none of them compared favourably in pricing or functionality. The L4U system, already in use in Trail for five years, was finally purchased in 1998. The new hardware, software and server were installed and the staff started training themselves in Windows NT. L4U would not be immediately functional, as barcodes had to be attached to the books. The smart barcodes arrived in early 1999 and twenty-five volunteers set to work applying the strips. During the same time period, magnetic strips for a 3M Tattle-Tape Loss Prevention System were inserted. Also installed at this time was a security (loss prevention) gate. This early loss prevention system was less than ideal, and loss still occurred. PCs replaced the prior system's dumb terminals, which meant that all the circulation computers now had word processing capability and the internet.

In hopes of completing the barcode application process by the fall, the Library shut down for two hours a week to allow the staff to barcode books. By May, however, there were so many public objections to the reduction in Library hours that the Library returned to its regular hours. From that point on, barcoding was done as time allowed. The loss prevention gates were turned on in June. With the hefty price tag of L4U, and the magnetic strips costing out at thousands more than expected, a mail-out plea for donors occurred. In addition to the staff barcoders working outside of Library hours of operation, the use of volunteer barcoders saved considerably in labour costs.

As the Library prepared to transition to L4U, the old automated system became quite fragile, with the server constantly going down. The library closed for forty-eight hours to finish entering names into the new system and to train the on-call staff. The public access catalogue was up and running, and the barcoding of patron cards completed. A further perk was the online installation of Encyclopaedia Britannica.

It was early in the year 2000 before the new automated system, L4U, was in use. The card catalogue was retired and catalogue stations were introduced to the public. L4U provided faster check-out and check-in than the old system. The database was more accessible, and staff could create and print out reports. Regrettably, these attributes were overshadowed by L4U's many flaws, most notably in the circulation functions such as fines and placing holds.

In 2001, the Nelson Municipal Library went through a transition with the arrival of picture book shelving. Over the summer, volunteers assembled shelving for the lower floor as well as the reference section upstairs. A Library Board committee was created to investigate expansion to the lower floor. Although such an expansion might still be five years away, the Library Board recognized the need to start planning the process of funding the renovations while managing the ongoing expenses of operating the Library.

Mounting problems with the glitches in the L4U automated system, now nicknamed 'Hell 4 U' by the staff, became intolerable. Following the visit of L4U's senior programmer and some pricey server upgrades, the system worked substantially better. The server was moved to a more secure location, where the unshielded wires were no longer in such close proximity to the loss prevention gates. Several great new functions were included in the new system, yet the upgrade failed to remove the outstanding problems in existence since the first version was purchased by the Library.

By early 2003, the L4U had been upgraded again, the changeover frustrating despite the staff's efforts. Problems with the L4U upgrade were being reported in other libraries, making the Mandarin system used by many Kootenay libraries increasingly desirable.

Thomas was pleased when the City hooked the Library up to their fast internet and to MAIS, their accounting system. Thomas found both highly beneficial and appreciated being able to contact other City staff so easily. As the Library now had a much more complex system involving four servers, tech support became an essential component of the 2002 Library budget considerations.

Author Readings: June to November, 2001

- Elaine DuPuis – non-fiction author June – 16 people in attendance
- bill bissett – poet June – 70 people in attendance
- Seven Sisters Writing Group September – 35 people in attendance
- Jan Zwicky – poet September — 50 people in attendance
- Holley Rubinsky – fiction author September – 40 people in attendance
- Esta Spalding – author, screenwriter, poet October – 35 people in attendance
- Diane Swanson – children’s science author October — 27 people in attendance
- Dave Perrin – Kootenay veterinary author October – 13 people in attendance
- Fred Wah – poet, novelist November – 45 people in attendance

There was no deficit for the 2001 Library budget, thanks to grants, donations and the institution of a charge at the Library’s email stations. The Library Board’s long-range planning and the backing of City Council also had a positive impact. “It feels good after a few years of financial panic, to feel that we are on solid ground again,” commented Deb Thomas in her Chief Librarian’s Report for 2001.

Embracing the Information Age

Deb Thomas took part in negotiating a consortium purchase by West Kootenay libraries of a license for EBSCOHost, an online database package of business, health, and general databases. Accessed through the Library’s website, EBSCOHost contained business, health, and general databases, with more than 1800 sources. A scanner and a digital camera were added to equipment inventory. The chief librarian and office manager’s new DELL computers arrived. DELL was chosen for the company’s excellent free online tech-support system. The computers they replaced became catalogue stations and the old catalogue computers were sold. An equipment reserve fund was of foremost importance for 2003.

A local cataloguing project funded by the Columbia Basin Trust and the Columbia Kootenay Cultural Alliance was completed in 2002. It involved cataloguing the uncatalogued Canadian and local archival materials that had been part of the Nelson Municipal Library collection for a decade.

After ten years in the new facility at 602 Stanley Street, the statistics spoke for themselves in demonstrating increases in Library use in every area possible. A 35% increase in circulation activity alone had occurred over the last decade.

In early 2004, the public access stations were replaced by six new computers. One of them was a server, which would allow the Library to offer the catalogue through the website. A further computer was hooked up to the microfilm reader to facilitate the creation of digital files of search results to satisfy the requests of local history & genealogy buffs.

Thomas surveyed the staff regarding the Library's automation initiatives. She discovered that the staff was learning essential technological knowledge and skills on-the-job, rather than prior to the implementation of new initiatives. Government cutbacks on live representation in smaller communities such as Nelson, as well as reduced print publication of government information, meant that Library staff helped patrons with internet reference work in ways never encountered before: locating authoritative sources of health information, downloading government forms, and directing patrons to locate the wording of provincial or federal statutes.

The staff of the Nelson Public Library recognized this new role of public libraries. Thomas hoped that in the future, provincial and federal governments would equip library staffs with ongoing training in order to benefit their members. She hoped the provincial government would provide for the maintenance of the internet stations that the province helped the Library to purchase. Some assistance existed. Youth@BC programs offered training and technical support, but the successful program was cut altogether by the province. The federal Community Access Program (CAP) sustainability grants, which provided biennial funding to upgrade hardware and software and provide connectivity, were not cut. However, priorities shifted, and as the funds were given to regional non-library networks to dispense, Nelson Municipal Library no longer benefitted. Thomas recognized the challenges facing the libraries of the future. The internet was gradually replacing the traditional role of the library in the procurement of information. Computer purchase, upgrade and maintenance, website creation and maintenance, connectivity, and barcoding continually strained the budget. "I believe we risk losing many library users if our traditional services deteriorate," said Chief Librarian Deb Thomas [in her 2004 report 'Computers and Traditional Library Services: balance in all things'], "and equally believe we risk becoming marginalized as a 'warehouse for books' if we do not also embrace new technologies and new ways of providing those users with information, enlightenment and entertainment, providing the best in both traditional and technological services to our patrons."

Positive Steps Forward Through Partnerships

The Summer Reading and Activities Program, a seasonal highlight for Nelson children, started off in 2001 with an opening party featuring Flydini the Magician. With the arrival of 200 partygoers, many children had to be turned away. A fire alarm sounded in the middle of the

event, doubling the audience's unrestrained glee. These programs were run by youth through the federal programs Young Canada Works and Summer Career Placement. The Library also received funding to hire a Youth@BC employee to offer internet training, maintain the youth web page and internet computers, and manage outreach to area organizations. A fourth youth worked as a Collection Management assistant through Summer Career Placement.

In 2003, Youth Services Librarian Nancy Radonich started up a Teen Advisory Board, providing a forum for teens to give input on programs, services and collections. One youth even sat on the Library Board of Directors. The teens wanted a more private place to congregate, and space was found on the Library's lower floor. For two years, it was used as a place to study, hold book discussions and gather without interfering with the library experience of adult users. Younger teens sometimes felt somewhat out-of-place in the noisy atmosphere at the local Youth Centre, which was predominately frequented by older youth. It made sense for the Library to work in tandem with the Youth Centre by providing a safe haven for Nelson teens. Radonich also encouraged local teacher-librarians to promote the Library through class trips. Such trips provided teens with the tools to obtain information independently, and encouraged them to feel comfortable in a library setting.

Joanne Harris was at the helm as a jam-packed Preschool Storytime commenced. The popular Mother Goose Toddlertime ran simultaneously, led by Radonich and Harris. Offered jointly with CBAL, the literacy and language development program suited children almost ready for the Library's reading program. Hallowe'en Tales unnerved and entertained the eight-to-twelve crowd, it was 'cross-legged room only' at the Sunflower Puppet Theatre presentation of Too Many Cooks, and teens discovered their inner writer during a Creative Writing course. The Chess Club met weekly at the Library, and in lieu of rent, made book donations to the Library. The Chess Club always relinquished their meeting room to paying room rental clients if necessary, as did the Gamers (magic and role playing card games).

In the larger picture, a new spirit of partnership was also in development and there was discussion of a plan for Kootenay libraries to move in a unified direction. The Kootenays' eighteen public libraries had long collaborated in the sharing of ideas, programming and public relations, and in consortium arrangements such as the licensing of EBSCoast, an agreement with the National Film Board to purchase their films at a reduced cost, and an agreement with the United Library Services to buy a minimum of \$100,000 in book purchases annually as a group to get a larger discount. The formation of the Kootenay Library Federation (KLF) would formalize this cooperation. Each library would maintain its autonomy, but save money and time by sharing services and resources. Reciprocal borrowing, shared collections, group purchasing of collections, equipment and supplies, and joint programming and public relations were priorities.

The KLF was the first rural library federation in B.C., formed before the province made rural library federations a priority. Through the KLF, provincial funding was available to negotiate further consortium agreements, regional training, and even a regional conference. Deb Thomas, along with Pat Adams, then Chief Librarian of the Cranbrook Public Library, took an active role in the consortium negotiations with the West Kootenay Library Association, and in the formation of the KLF. The KLF enabled the Nelson Municipal Library to strike off in directions previously considered unattainable by a small, independent library.

The Era of Change

In the fall of 2004, Trish Miller of the Surrey Public Library took over as chief librarian, while Deb Thomas completed her Masters in Library and Information Studies at the School of Library, Archival and Information Studies at UBC. Under Miller's influence, the Library partnered with CBAL and the Nelson Leafs hockey team in Reading Buddies, during which children read aloud or played literacy games with a Leafs player, and in the Family Literacy fundraiser, Skate for Literacy. A long-lasting relationship developed between the Library and the hockey team in the provision of children's literacy initiatives. Miller approved the start-up of preliminary drawings and estimates to provide improved accessibility at the Library entrance. She organized the weeding of the collections and the removal of unneeded shelving, expanded the Library's hours, and enhanced the Library space with carpeting and a coat of paint.

In September of 2005, Deb Thomas returned from her educational leave at UBC. The staff and Library Board had enjoyed working with Trish Miller, who returned to Surrey to continue her career.

The future of the remaining books from the former David Thompson University Centre library was in question, a collection protected fiercely twenty years earlier by a dedicated group of local residents. The building in which the collection resided was deteriorating and the City was unwilling to renovate or rebuild it. Trish Miller and Selkirk College Librarian Liz Ball had assessed the physical state of the academic collection. Coordinator Kim Charlesworth along with Ron Welwood, former DTUC chief librarian and now volunteer, offered Nelson Municipal Library, MAAG and Selkirk College Library first refusal rights to the collection. Deb Thomas selected items suitable for the Library, focusing on Canadian literature, reference works and historic material. The remainder of the collection was offered to B.C. post-secondary libraries, community organizations, and eventually, private book dealers.

In 2006, the Nelson Municipal Library ranked third highest provincially in per capita circulation for libraries serving populations of 8,500 to 13,000 people. Ranked first in the same category for the West Kootenays, the Library circulated over 120,000 items a year to the 80% of Nelson's residents who were Library members.

Automation and technology had come a long way since the first computer was plugged in at Nelson Municipal Library in the mid-'80s. By 2006, Nelson Municipal Library offered eight public computers with access to the Internet, seventeen subscription databases, children's programs, a full suite of programs from MS Office, and a laptop plug-in station. Access was available to a microfilm reader/printer, newspaper microfilms, and local history archives from 1891 onward. By 2006, the ability to self-initiate interlibrary loans caused a sharp drop in the time spent by staff entering data online. This was a welcome development, with 1600 to 1800 books borrowed annually from other libraries and 500 loaned out. By 2007, members could download audio books and transfer them to a portable device or burn them to a CD. Two computers connected the public to the catalogue, which was also accessible online. Every staff desk in the Library had a computer on it, each machine essential to the smooth operation of the Library. The purchase of DAISY readers for CNIB books was appreciated by the area's vision-impaired residents. The world of e-books squatted shakily on the technology horizon, striking fear and loathing in some library patrons, and anticipation in others.

In conjunction with the Kootenay Library Federation, the Library looked into purchasing the self-serve public computer option, Useful. This system reduced staff time spent on tedious tasks, incorporating open source software, maintenance, and booking management into the research stations.

In 2006 – to be closer to her children and grandchildren – Chief Librarian Deb Thomas resigned from the Nelson Municipal Library to manage the Kingsway Branch of the Burnaby Public Library. In her letter of resignation of May 19, 2006, Thomas wrote "It is with mixed emotions that I leave the Nelson Municipal Library after 18 years. I have learned so much about being a librarian and a manager and given a substantial piece of my life to the operation and advancement of this library. The staff have become like family and the library itself my second home. I am grateful for all the Nelson and area residents I've been able to meet and befriend ... and will miss them all."

2006 Nelson Municipal Library Survey Comments

- The best library staff I've ever met!
- The Nelson Library is wonderful. I've spent many happy evening hours here. Sometimes it seems a bit noisy, maybe I'm old-fashioned, but it seems the primary purpose of a library is to find books and to sit and read with a like-minded community.
- Only use email.
- The laptop plug-in is great as I cannot go wireless (no card) and can't afford a high speed connection at home.
- Considering the space that you have you are all doing a wonderful job!

- ... Really great job; less technology and automation; libraries are people places, Thank you. Your staff are most excellent. Thank you!

Wayne Cole took over for Deb Thomas as the new chief librarian in the summer of 2006. Cole had taught English in colleges and universities. He had been the director of three academic libraries, as well as a reference librarian in several academic, education and public libraries. The services the Nelson Municipal Library was able to offer its members were rapidly expanding. The Outreach Service transported books and books on tape to those living in long-term care facilities and seniors' homes.

Provincial Collaboration

A new provincial initiative called BC OneCard was introduced in 2006 to promote literacy. "The beauty of this," said Wayne Cole, Nelson Municipal Library's Chief Librarian, "is, regardless of where a person lives or where they are travelling throughout the province, they can drop into any public library. They show the proper identification and then they are issued the BC OneCard, which allows them to borrow books from any of the public libraries in BC." Although free membership with Nelson Municipal Library was a boon for tourists and visitors to Nelson, staff time, administrative and postage costs raised worries about the strain the new initiative might place on library budgets.

A second initiative, Every-School-Child-A-Card, was designed to ensure equal access to public library services by providing free library cards for every school child across British Columbia. The 2% of BC's population living outside the jurisdictional areas of regional or municipal libraries had been paying a non-resident fee to use public libraries. "Now, regardless of where they live, children are exempt from having to pay that fee," explained Cole. During 2007, however, concerns arose. Fewer adults and families were registering for non-resident library cards and were instead using their children's cards for "free."

Plans had been underway for several years to improve entry for seniors or disabled patrons through the front doors of the Nelson Municipal Library. The automatic doors, widened entrance and accessibility ramp completed in early 2007 ushered the Library into a new era, bringing to mind the distance the Library had come since its last home at the top of the steep staircase at the Civic Centre. Mayor John Dooley told those gathered to commemorate the Library's new accessibility, "[City Hall is] committed to the library. It's an important piece of the fabric of any community to have access for people to get to books."

The Nelson Municipal Library used the Public Libraries Online Template (PLOT) to give a clean, crisp look and new features to the Library website, providing an events calendar, a photo album, a Library News portlet and content for the Weblink and Database pages. By 2007, a visit to the Nelson Municipal Library website allowed patrons to search the Library catalogue, read

magazines, encyclopedias, and health and auto resource material, download audio books and transfer them to a portable device or burn them to a CD, and chat online with reference librarians around the province.

Chief Librarian Wayne Cole put in his resignation to the Library Board in late 2007, citing personal reasons. "I am very happy to have been able to serve the Nelson Municipal Library in the capacity of Chief Librarian these past twelve months. I believe with the excellent direction set by the Library Board and the dedicated efforts of our very fine library staff that, together, we have been able [to] advance library service operations substantially."

The Revitalization Period

Nelson Municipal Library's new chief librarian was Charlie Kregel, hired on a six-month contract to bring improvements to the Library. Nicknamed "The Fixer", Kregel presented a fresh face and mindset in his new position. He revamped the staff's daily tasks and the Library's physical space, and supported moving downstairs to create a better kids' space. Kregel favoured cooperating more with other organizations on collection development and access, and event planning. He forged better relationships with the City, especially the Mayor, Council and senior staff. Through the restructuring of staff positions, Kregel created the positions of adult, teen, children's, circulation and tech services coordinator, resulting in a team approach. He secured a \$100,000 Columbia Basin Trust grant to revitalize the Library, focusing on improving the collection. Kregel advocated for better services for non-residents, so that they truly felt the desire to support the Library through membership. Kregel famously came in at five a.m. with a come-along and winch and single-handedly moved shelves to achieve better layout and maximum light for the Library.

On April 1, 2008, June Stockdale became the new chief librarian, following five years as chief librarian of Castlegar & District Public Library. Stockdale believed in the importance of public libraries to an educated and culturally-diverse society. With twenty years of experience working in public libraries, a diploma in Computer Science, and another in Library and Information Technology, Stockdale brought much to the table. Stockdale wished to build an inclusive, accessible, and welcoming library by bringing the regional areas into the service population of Nelson Municipal Library and by building on Charlie Kregel's changes to the Library's physical space. Upon assuming her new role, Stockdale lowered the membership fees for non-residents to build good will in the community and allow area residents to learn about library service.

June Stockdale and the Nelson Municipal Library staff understood the importance of partnering with other community groups. Stockdale and several Library Board members participated in Literacy Planning with School District #8 in increasing the accessibility of library service to all area residents. Other joint efforts involved working with Touchstones Museum and the Capitol Theatre as cultural service providers. The Nelson Municipal Library assisted with the programs

of the Columbia Basin Alliance for Literacy (CBAL) by providing space for tutors and learners to congregate, space for events, and promotional in-Library advertising. The Library and CBAL partnered to foster literacy awareness by supporting the Books Everywhere project. Bins of books were placed at businesses and public places about town. The books could be borrowed and dropped off again at the same or a different book bin.

Due to patron concerns about the Library's hours of operation, the Library had shifted to a consistent 11 am opening in 2004. The new hours were favourably received, as were the 8 pm closings Mondays and Wednesdays and the 6 p.m. closings the remainder of the week. In 2005, the Library added an 11 am - 3 pm Sunday opening between mid-October and mid-April. Although circulation lessened significantly on Sundays, foot traffic increased. Many patrons used the openings for quiet study or family time, and appreciated the availability of parking. The experiment with Sunday openings was short-lived. In 2011, the consistent morning opening moved to 10 a.m. to convenience the many seniors and young families who used the Library predominantly in the mornings.

Stockdale found the Integrated Library System, L4U, cumbersome for the staff. The transition to the Mandarin M3 system had become essential as the L4U system had been crashing almost daily for months. The L4U system had been designed for schools, not public libraries. Its statistical tracking was weak and the perpetual crashing wasted valuable staff time, while hampering customer service. With June Stockdale's experience as the Western Canada trainer for Mandarin M3, there would be no additional set-up and training expenses during the Library's transition to the Mandarin M3 system. The new system would expand the services available for online patrons, and benefit the staff by allowing online catalogue searches, interlibrary loans, the reserving and renewal of library items, and email notifications for overdues. It would create new systems for handling patron membership renewals.

A whirlwind of advancements drew attention to the Library. The start-up of an outreach service to the seniors at Mountain Lake was an immediate success. A self-check system was installed. An in-house Literacy Trivia Challenge celebrated International Literacy Day. Joanne Harris got a Teen Advisory Board underway. A campaign occurred to promote the NML library card as the most essential school supply. A collection of books on MP3s called Playaways generated community interest, blazing a fragile but historic fork in the road for Library staff and members alike.

The Library promotion of the EBSCO online magazines accessed through the Library's website intensified interest from 80 hits a month to over 500. Downloadable audio use increased by 30% and all other databases registered steady increases. Thanks to a CBT grant, the Library's music collection expanded by 150 new CDs and two new CD cabinets. The Library subscribed to

many new databases including travel, language, and career, resulting in significant increases in use of the Online Branch.

Expansion: Outreach Library Service

Many Area H residents were voicing interest in changing how they used local library services. Winlaw resident Sharon Block and other Library supporters campaigned to secure library service for Area H in Nelson and/or Castlegar, gathering support through signatures from Area residents. In the mid-1990's, the Books by Mail library administered by the Library Services Branch of the Ministry of Municipal Affairs had closed its doors. When the residents of the rural Kootenays lost Books by Mail, they became part of the 2% of the province without free library services (paid by taxation). Their only option was to purchase a library membership yearly at a cost of \$95 per family, \$65 per adult or \$25 per child. Sharon Block and the Library supporters proposed adding taxation for library usage to Area H taxes.

Non-Resident Statistics: May, 2002

Registered Borrowers by Region	Population
• City	8,156 9,298 (88 %)
• Area F	387 3,907
• Area H	293 4,482
• Area E	334 3,531
• Area G	7
• Kaslo	19
• Other areas	61

To stimulate interest in library service, Nelson Municipal Library, School District #8, and CBAL partnered with the City and Area H to start up outreach library service to Winlaw in the spring and autumn of 2009. Residents with a paid membership would be able to order books, videos, CDs, films or audio books online, choose reading material from a collection of some 300 books, and pick up library materials delivered weekly by the school district's courier service. Nelson Library staff ran the centre and trained residents in the use of the Library's online services. Guest speakers made presentations and a drop box for returns saved borrowers the drive to Nelson.

The spring run of the Winlaw School outreach project was a success, especially in terms of building good will in the rural area. An average of sixteen residents attended the pilot project each Thursday evening, and approximately thirty items were checked out each week. Requests were made for more frequent collection rotations when the project started up again in the fall. The project was a 'proof of concept' as a model for regional delivery. Area resident Lois Lawrence said about the project, "It has been years since I was able to have a library card—trips to Nelson mean groceries, dentist, etc. Now I order books ahead via the website (even

interlibrary loans) and bike or walk my dog to the Winlaw School to pick up what I've requested. The people are friendly, both library staff and other borrowers ... I'm really enjoying Thursday nights because of this service. As I write, 4 kids soccer teams are playing outside, younger ones are enjoying a library story time in the next room, people are using computers, and several of us are visiting and signing out resources. I will do anything I can to keep this library project happening here in Winlaw."

Vote Yes for Regional Library Service

Discussions about creating a Regional Library service got underway between the RDCK, the Directors of Electoral Areas E, F and H, City staff, School District #8, June Stockdale and the Library Board. Of great concern to the Nelson Municipal Library was the fact that in 2010, almost 12,000 of the 49,000 British Columbians still without tax-supported library service were living in RDCK Areas E, F and H. The level of service provided by Nelson Municipal Library could not continue to be offered to those people residing in Areas E, F and H, as these residents comprised 17% of Library memberships and borrowed 30% of the Library materials in circulation, while contributing only 2% of the Library's operating income. Many library users seemed to be without membership altogether.

In considering a Regional Library service, one thing was certain. Local residents treasured their Library. Although increases in library use in Nelson had initially been generated by the move to Stanley Street with its expanded services and collections, they were sustained by the ongoing economic recession. Media coverage in 2009 touted the importance of libraries during tough economic times. In September, 2009 alone, 2400 uses of the public access computers and 1200 hits on the online databases were registered, 100 audio books were downloaded, and 1600 in-person and on-line reference questions were answered. Nelson Municipal Library claimed the highest circulation in B.C. libraries in communities ranging from 8000 to 25,000 residents. In-person visits per capita were 90% higher than the provincial average. On a less encouraging note, Nelson Municipal Library had fewer staff members and a smaller collection and service area than the libraries of similarly-sized communities.

The RDCK Directors for Areas E, F and H conducted a feasibility study to evaluate the potential for a Regional Library service. A steering committee comprised of residents from the Areas worked with Areas E, F and H on a consultation process. Fact sheets were broadly distributed to present the Library's responses to questions fielded to the residents interviewed. Community meetings were held in Nelson, Winlaw, Blewett and Redfish on meeting the needs of the outlying communities. The decision was made to hold a referendum to allow adjoining Area residents to vote on contributing to the Library through taxation. If the proposal succeeded, Area residents would pay \$10.30 per \$100,000 of assessed property value; eg. for a home assessed at \$360,000, supporting the Library through taxation would cost \$36.00 a year or \$3 a month.

The benefits of a Regional Library service to rural residents were many. There would be outreach library services for Slokan Valley and Kootenay Lake, and shut-in service to rural Areas would be extended. Directors from each Area would sit on the Library Board. The Library's collections and opening hours would be expanded. If all three rural Areas agreed to support the Library through taxation, collaboration between the Nelson Library and school libraries would expand to provide better student services. Area residents would benefit from the range of on-line services now offered by the Nelson Municipal Library: free online and in-library computer services, online resource and reference services, downloadable audio, homework assistance, and business and health databases. Half a dozen digital e-book readers, pre-loaded with 100 books, were available for downloading from the Library's web subscription.

Conversely, changes were inevitable for those rural Areas voting against supporting the Library through taxation. Annual Library card membership fees would increase to \$120 per family living in the same household to better reflect the costs associated with the provision of library services.

On October 16th, 2010, residents from Balfour to Winlaw voted on whether they supported library service through taxation. The failed referenda of the '80s and '90s had forced the Nelson Municipal Library to impose membership fees on patrons living outside Nelson. Just prior to the referendum, Area F resident Greg Maslak said in a September 24th Letter to the Editor in the Nelson Star: "A free library is the cradle of our democracy. A place where all the citizenry have access to all information; where neither social standing, nor political leaning, nor wealth receives the slightest consideration ... The public library is not some antiquated depository of books to be taken for granted until it is left behind by an electronic age. It is the place where our sentences and words live. A place where parents teach their children the love of reading, just as their parents taught them. A place to be cherished and taken care of. If some people do not wish to use the public library, that is their choice. But all of us have an obligation, as part of a democratic open society, to ensure that those who do use the public library can do so for free."

The referendum vote was successful in Electoral Areas F and H, but failed in Area E. Area E registered 390 Yes votes and 597 No votes, Area F 416 Yes votes and 413 No votes, and Area H (southern portion) 489 Yes votes and 316 No votes. With more potential library patrons, funding could now be released from the City through a contribution from the local dams, and from the Province due to the increased tax base.

"This is a positive outcome," said June Stockdale, chief librarian of the Nelson Library [in the Valley Voice on October 20, 2010]. "7400 people have just joined the service through universal access, joining 99% of the province in the ability to freely access this essential service."

Although the Library’s legal name was retained, the name was changed to Nelson Public Library as a business rebrand. The word ‘municipal’ was no longer appropriate, due to the increased service area post-referendum. As promised, Area residents were appointed to the Library Board: Area H resident Sharon Block and Area F resident Greg Maslak. The Library Board welcomed Areas F and H South into the fold on January 1, 2011.

New members from the areas signed up in droves, a substantial change from 2010 when an average of 5 to 10 members signed up monthly.

<i>NML Memberships</i>	<i>2010</i>	<i>2011</i>	<i>%Change</i>
• City	6506	6635	2%
• Area E	548	565	3%
• Area F	545	825	51%
• Area H	580	802	38%

Expansion: The Children’s Library

By 2009, Nelson Municipal Library was struggling to function properly within the confines of its inadequate service space. The relocation of the children’s section to the lower level was essential. The move increased the service area from 7800 to 13,000 square feet. Architectural drawings had been drafted and floor plans designed. A main floor reconfiguration allowed the installation of an interior stairwell and an elevator. The family change room doubled as a wheelchair-accessible washroom. The downstairs renovation included a children’s area, computer stations, and a CBAL Learning Centre in the small meeting room. Book sales, author readings, children’s story times, teen nights and meetings would be held in the Learning Centre during closed hours.

Plans to make The Learning Place a permanent fixture on the lower level were considered, as the Library wished to support this literacy work. However, at the completion of the centre’s six month run, it was determined that the implications of allowing another group to use the Library’s already inadequate space meant that a new site for the literacy centre needed to be found. Fortunately they were welcomed to the lower level of City Hall.

A community fundraising program got underway to support the library expansion. A donation tracker was set up and press releases issued. Author Deryn Collier made a YouTube video expressing the importance of community libraries and universal access, and pleas for support were made through on-line announcements, newspaper articles, and radio broadcasts. The Friends of the Library, responsible for raising a remarkable \$111,000 for Nelson Municipal Library since 1995, held book sales, raffles and other fundraisers. Donations to the Library were made by a grand procession of individuals, businesses, clubs and organizations who truly

believed in the value of the Library to the community. “Our Municipal Library is one more reason to love living in Nelson,” said Nelson City Mayor John Dooley in the Nelson Daily News on January 12, 2007. “In a community as culturally enriched as Nelson it’s no surprise that the Library is such a well-used resource.”

In recognition of a \$50,000 donation made by Bruce Ramsay, the children’s area of the Library was named the William and Isabel Ramsay Children’s Library, in honour of Bruce’s parents. Volunteers, including the Nelson Rotary Club, started the monumental job of transferring the children’s library shelving, books and furniture from the main floor to the lower level. The children’s librarian offices and technical services were also moved downstairs. The new offices upstairs were furnished and the remaining collections upstairs relocated. The teen collections were transitioned into a private corner, complete with their own seating and computers. In the fall of 2010, the children’s library and staff offices moved to the lower level of the Library and the upstairs offices.

The expansion reached its completion in December of 2010. An October Open House celebrated the children’s library expansion, the 90th anniversary of Nelson Municipal Library, and the much-anticipated launch of Seasonings: a year of local flavour in words and recipes. In 2008, Adult Services Coordinator Anne DeGrace and June Stockdale had hatched a cookbook fundraising plan, with locally-written stories and poems honouring the seasons clustered together with recipes sculpted around the harvests of Nelson farms and gardens. A project jointly supported by the Nelson Municipal Library and the Kootenay Country Store Cooperative and backed by a whirlwind of dedicated volunteers, the cookbook was co-edited by DeGrace and the Co-op’s Jocelyn Carver, designed by Steven Cretney, and featured photos by photographer Heather Goldsworthy. Launched in October, by Christmas the initial investment had been repaid. In 2011, Seasonings was shortlisted by the Canadian Culinary Book Awards in the Canadian Culinary Culture category. By the end of 2013, the cookbook had surpassed the target estimate for earnings as a fundraiser with a net profit of \$33,000.

Fundraising for the expansion progressed steadily throughout 2010. Shelf plaques in the Buy-A-Shelf campaign ensured donor recognition. Cloth library bags were sold. Early in 2011, the \$100,000 fundraising goal was met.

More Than Just a Collection in a Building

In 2010, Teen Services Coordinator Joanne Harris made a determined effort to increase the presence of teens in the Library. Harris coordinated a high school author reading, set up a teen movie night, and encouraged teens to write book review columns for the website and the newsletter. Teens tutored local youth in the Reading Buddies program, while others enrolled in a resume writing workshop sponsored jointly with the Youth Centre. Nancy Radonich hosted

weekly story times and book browsing for special needs students from LVR, many of them teens.

Heather Goldik and Shirley Reimer streamlined the Library's cataloguing and website, developing new pages in the Library website linking to other community websites, government resources and information. Goldik added booklists to make it easier for members to choose their next book.

Building a cultural appreciation of libraries through partnerships became a goal of foremost importance for the Nelson Public Library. A literacy fundraising event "Oysters, Authors and Ale" was held two years running, co-produced by the Library, Community Literacy (CBAL) and Selkirk College. The event, featuring CBC Radio hosts Cheryl McKay in 2009, Arthur Black in 2010, and oysters brought in from Cortes Island, supported literacy programs and collections for the Community Literacy Program and Nelson Municipal Library. "Storyteller's Saloon", co-produced by the Library and Touchstones Museum in 2011, raised funds toward the development of an online directory of community archival materials in the Kootenays. CBC Radio Almanac's Mark Forsythe hosted the event which featured storytellers Corky Evans, Richard Rowberry and Carolyn McTaggart. The Library also partnered with Touchstones and Kootenay Gallery to provide lendable memberships for their galleries. Such interest was generated that a waiting list was formed.

Area Director Ramona Faust agreed to provide funding so that Area E families with school age or younger children could receive 50% Library membership subsidies. All others could receive subsidies from the Library's private donor fund, created in 2010 after an anonymous supporter offered to subsidize membership for patrons unable to afford Library cards.

A change in thinking accelerated in 2011 and 2012 as the staff at Nelson Public Library increased the time spent outside the actual Library building providing service to the community. Stockdale and her staff realized the necessity of Library participation at events catering to families and in connecting with the community at established gathering places: attending community group meetings, partnering with CBAL in program delivery, attending community events such as festivals, and providing outreach to schools.

In 2012, collaboration between the Nelson Public Library and School District #8 continued to expand through the promotion of Library activities in school newsletters, the annual visits of Library staff to schools, the education of school library staff and parents about the NPL's online offerings, and the launching of the student delivery and pickup program to L.V. Rogers and Mt. Sentinel secondary schools. At the same time, Joanne Harris offered library orientation sessions for interested students attending alternate schools such as Central Education Centre, Self Design High and the Reach program.

Nelson Public Library upped its community involvement in other ways. Kootenay Co-op Radio offered the Library a regular spot on their morning program. The Library hosted the open house for the City's financial plan and partnered with the Social Planning Action Network to present an Election Reverse Forum event, discussing social issues.

In 2012, the official launch of library service at the Heritage Credit Union in Slocan Park saw ten new members join up. Library staff member Shirley Reimer set up a one-day membership and information desk and trained residents in the use of the Library's online services. Over time, the location proved most popular as a drop-off for returns. From January through March, 2012, 39 library items were delivered to the Heritage Credit Union in Slocan Park, with 292 items returned.

The Library supported seniors in numerous ways. CBAL Cyber Seniors computer visited the Library to learn about e-services. Over two dozen seniors from the Learning in Retirement group enrolled in a training session in the use of the Library's online resources. The Library offered online information from the government on issues facing seniors in Canada. During outreach to Mountain Lakes and Lakeview Village in 2012, thirty-two new NPL members signed up and 198 residents checked out items.

The Library had seven volunteers scheduled weekly, each of them working two hour shifts. Their duties included: preparation for the children's programs, shelf-reading, washing books, processing deleted books, preparing handouts and brochures, replacing worn out labels, stamping due date bookmarks, and replacing damaged DVD cases.

In March of 2012, the Library circulation record was again broken at 24,679 from a collection of 43,000 items. Membership reached 10, 665.

As a novelist and a One Book One Kootenay featured author, Anne DeGrace's writing career generated much public interest over the years. DeGrace stepped out of her personal writing whirlwind twenty-six times a year to promote the Nelson Public Library by penning columns for The Nelson Star.

To increase efficiency and improve member service, the Library migrated to the provincial Evergreen system, Sitka in 2012. The new system offered the functionality required for shared cataloguing, a strong management team to assist with troubleshooting and maintenance, and improved patron service. The Sitka ILS was already in use in more than fifty B.C. libraries, as well as libraries and universities worldwide.

2013 Nelson Public Library Washroom Graffiti

- This library is awesome! Thank you.
- If you desire a happy life, you must first cultivate happiness within self.
- In silence, we begin to hear wisdom's voice.
- Not all who wander are lost. Tolkien
- Nelson is a beautiful place.
- Marijuana: safer than peanuts

Moving Forward with Creativity and Enthusiasm

Nelson Public Library purchased a self-check machine from an Alberta at a substantially discounted rate of \$200. Taking into consideration the Sitka upgrade, multiple computer upgrades, and the new phone system, security gates, and self-check machine, the Nelson Public Library had become one of the most technologically-updated departments in Nelson.

Concerns were raised over community interest in continuing outreach at Winlaw School. Slocan Valley residents were questioned about ways to improve community attendance and involvement. Encouraging various community groups to participate at the outreach sessions was discussed. In her Librarian's Report of February 12, 2013, June Stockdale commented, "We have been working with Alison Salo of CBAL in the Slocan Valley to try to ensure we have local community involvement at the Winlaw Outreach Library events. She did a storytime last month and the Stephen Lewis Foundation Grassroots Grannies will be there this time. I believe it's key to involve the local community to build the success of this program ..."

In 2012, the Library launched a new fundraising campaign called the "Taste of Nelson". Available at the Library were: packages of Read All Night! Special Oso Negro "Library Brew" coffee, bookmarks created by local artists, and Nelson Chocofellar Library Bars, sporting humorous book spine covers such as Pride and Pecans, The Call of the Wild Hazelnut and Much Ado About Chocolate. Library Board Chair Dianne Harke turned her funny bone to the "on" setting at the Friends of the Library (also known as the 'Friendlies') annual book sale, by calling out humorous remarks about the names to promote sales. The popular fundraising campaign won the Nelson Public Library the 2013 B.C. Library Association Advocacy and Marketing Award.

Nancy Radonich and Shawna Cummings organized a Tween Spy Training Academy which was filled immediately, complete with a waiting list. Wild and Wacky Wednesdays drew in 21 teens for the Halloween makeup program and 10-20 teens for regular meetings. Joanne Harris started up a teen book club at Trafalgar Middle School and another teen book club was hosted by a homeschooled student and his mother at the Library.

At Nelson Public Library, the record for the most unusual employment history is held by Eva Walters. Originally hired as a shelver in 1975, at a time when shelving included washing the covers of the books with a Lysol solution, Walters took a correspondence community librarian course in her spare time. When Librarian Gerda Stockell retired in 1978, Walters submitted an application and was hired as chief librarian, keeping the position until 1982 when she went on maternity leave. Walters, who missed the work she had been doing at the Library, applied again in 1994 and was hired as an on-call employee. Thirty-eight years after starting (minus a twelve year break), Walters was still working at the Library at the end of 2013.

Library advancements continued to be numerous. Through the government registry provincial birth, death and marriage records were placed online. A new wifi system was installed, self-accessed with member passwords. In the fall, nearly everyone in the Library 'dropped everything and read' in the 20 minute D.E.A.R. literacy promotion program.

Those doubting the significance of libraries in today's world need only study Nelson Public Library's circulation statistics. In 2012, circulation totalled a whopping 236,000 items, up from 124,771 in 2000, and almost doubling from 85,008 in 1988. Library e-book circulation also almost doubled in 2012 from 2900 to 5400, and the Library e-newsletter was opened by 1300 to 1500 people monthly. The usage of the Library's travel-related databases A-Z Travel, Global Road Warrior and Rocket Languages doubled in early 2013 over the same time in 2012, likely due to promotion via the displays, website, e-newsletter, print newsletter and Anne DeGrace's column. Just as the trends predicted, the Library was now being used for much more than checking out books.

A Sample of Programs at the Nelson Public Library: February-September, 2013

- Sunday Afternoon Tea at the Hotel Phair (now the site of NPL): 1928 Meeting of the Ladies Literary Society. Storyteller Susan LeFebour as Gretchen Hatt Gibson. Touchstones photographic display.
- Marcia Braundy with her book *Men and Women and Tools*. Library cosponsor: The Women's Centre.
- Former New Denver mayor Gary Wright with his book *Unrepentant*, a darkly humorous memoir filled with drugs, sex and rock 'n roll.
- Holley Rubinsky book launch: *South of Elfrida*. A Kootenay favourite's short stories.
- Deanna Kawatsky with her book *Burning Man, Slaying Dragon*. This memoir received great reviews from CBC's Grant Lawrence, among others.
- John Neville talk on Raptors of Canada. Bird knowledge shared by the Birdsong Man (and former Nelson City Councillor).

June Stockdale's progressive thinking style included taking part in many provincial projects and initiatives outside Nelson. Stockdale gathered ideas and shared her own at the Union of BC Municipalities conference, met with provincial government officials, attended the Thomas Frey futurist conference, and was a strong force on the provincial Digital Literacy Project.

Today, the library metamorphosis occurring globally intrigues June Stockdale. Library Board meetings in 2013 reflected that interest. Nelson Public Library is a vibrant, modern community center with access to leading edge technology and ideas. Circulation at Nelson Public Library increased 40% in four years under Stockdale's leadership, while patron visits almost doubled. June Stockdale and the Library staff understand the necessity of remaining relevant and responsive in today's society, the importance of being forward-thinking.

Nelson Public Library is more than a collection within a building. The traditional methods of gathering information are still in use, but alternate search methods are present such as technology to convenience members. Author readings, children's story times and celebrations, quiet meeting spaces, technology training, outreach, and programming developed jointly with other community agencies – all of these mediums add varied dimensions to the library experience positioning the Library as a community hub. The Library has no barriers; a sense of belonging is felt upon arrival – a common thirst for knowledge and an all-encompassing appreciation of literacy. Our Library has improved our quality of life for almost a century, and will illuminate our children's pathways into the future.

A 2013 Nelson Public Library Moment

It was time to leave the Library.

"I don't want to go!" The three year old boy pulled against his mom's hand. "I don't want to go! I don't want to go! I don't want to go!"

The mother inched her boy across the children's department, glancing sideways to take in the smiles on the faces of other library users. Her son's protests continued relentlessly as they made their way up the staircase, and out the front door.