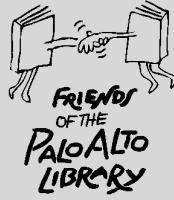


# FOREWORD



Quarterly Issue No. 65

Fall 2004

## Please Join Us!

For a lecture entitled

### **“Gown & Town: How to Build a SuperLibrary” with Dr. Jim Schmidt**

at the Friends of the Library Annual Meeting  
Wednesday, October 27, 7:30 p.m.  
Palo Alto Art Center Auditorium, 1313 Newell  
Free and open to the public - Refreshments provided

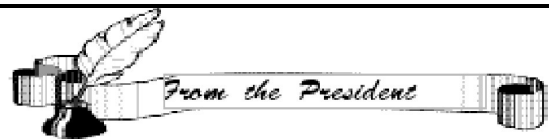
Jim Schmidt, Professor of Library and Information Sciences and former University Librarian at San Jose State University, will describe the experience of negotiating and completing San Jose's City-University Library, which is unique in the world.



### **Palo Alto's Dilemma Thoughts from the Library Director**

This morning I glanced at my calendar and realized that tomorrow will mark my 6-month anniversary in Palo Alto. Life has been a whirlwind so far, and it's showing no signs of calming down. Over the past few months, I've concentrated on meeting with as many Palo Altans as possible to hear their thoughts and opinions about the Library and to invite them to be part of an ongoing dialog about how to take our Library "to the next level." I've met with neighborhood groups, PTAs, homeowners associations, nonprofits, book discussion groups, business associations, and of course the Library's partners--the Library Advisory Commission, the Friends of the Palo Alto Library, and the Palo Alto Library Foundation.

*(Dilemma continued on page 2)*



### **Friends Book Sale Breaks All Records!**

*I cannot live without books.*  
Thomas Jefferson

If you haven't been to one of our monthly sales in awhile, you're missing one of the most wonderful events for booklovers in Palo Alto.

Not two years ago, the school district reclaimed our Terman facility and we were forced to move our book sale out.

*(Book Sale continued on page 2)*

*(Dilemma continued from page 1)*

I've heard a lot about what people treasure most about the Library, such as convenient access and friendly staff, and what they would most like to see improved--such as more books, more attention to local history, and more programs and services for children. Now it's time for me to begin to develop my assessment and recommendations for next steps.

**Recently, I've been quoted as saying "Palo Alto has five libraries and money enough for two-and-a-half."** What I mean by this is the Library's budget is stretched extremely thin-- covering staffing, collections and services in five facilities, but unfortunately doing little very well. The funding simply isn't there to support this service model. The overhead and duplication required to staff five service desks and supply five collections is considerable. Hours are too short in the smaller branches, and barely adequate in the larger ones. The collection is not large enough, and weak in many areas. It's not keeping up with changing times and interests, and it doesn't have the depth and breadth the community demands. The staff is stretched too thin and there are issues relating to the number of hourly employees at the Library. If the members of the staff were not so extraordinarily dedicated and determined to serve, we simply couldn't sustain this level of effort. We certainly can't keep it up indefinitely. There's not enough time or money to devote to new and innovative services to meet changing community needs. And of course all of the facilities are insufficient.

It seems at times we've confused quantity with quality, and sacrificed one at the expense of the other. Assuming Palo Alto wants a better library, there are two rather simplistic responses to this dilemma. The number of facilities could be reduced to two or three, and in my opinion the Library would then have a very healthy budget indeed. Hours of service would be longer, the collections would be better, and services for children, seniors and others would be enhanced. On the other hand, the five existing libraries could be retained, and one or more new funding sources could be established to support them. Would the community vote for a parcel tax, sales tax or other measure that would provide a new revenue stream for library services? If so, service hours would be longer, collections better, and so forth. A portion of these funds could be devoted to capital improvement projects and other infrastructure needs.

If the five branches are retained, and the commitment to neighborhood-based library service is indeed confirmed, I would encourage a systematic review of the population and demographics of the entire community. Should all neighborhoods receive the same, or nearly the same level of service? If so, we should certainly revisit having a branch library in southwest Palo Alto. Perhaps there should be another branch near Stanford West, and in other areas, as well. What will we do about serving the planned new

housing in south Palo Alto and around the Mayfield site? And how will we fund this expanded service model?

I think there has been too much focus on library buildings and not enough attention to library services. The buildings and their many and various shortcomings are really just the "presenting symptoms" of a serious disease. Before planning another building improvement, acceptable service levels need to be established, and endorsed. Following that, library facilities need to be planned in order to deliver those services, and to be flexible enough to continue to meet Palo Alto's needs for the next several decades.

Of course, it's also possible that people would agree that the Library is OK just as it is. After all, it gets high marks on customer satisfaction surveys. Nonetheless, it's doubtful that things can continue to go along as they have. The next round of budget reductions will require cutting into bone, not flesh. Or staff will reach the breaking point in a couple of different possible ways. Or the continued deterioration of the collection will render the library less and less relevant to people's lives. I suspect that none of these are likely, because Palo Altans value lifelong learning, information, education, and libraries. So we have the opportunity to embark on an exciting journey to indeed take the Library to the next level. And that's precisely why I decided to come to Palo Alto, and take this job that I love.

I haven't yet drawn any recommendations from the assessment I've summarized above. As I begin to do so, I do welcome advice, suggestions and comments from the Friends of the Library. You are major stakeholders in our community's library, and you are more familiar with it than the average citizen. Not only do I invite your participation as I develop my recommendations, I count on it. Please contact me--I look forward to hearing from you.

---Paula Simpson  
(650) 329 2403 or (650) 380 6971  
[paula.simpson@cityofpaloalto.org](mailto:paula.simpson@cityofpaloalto.org)

*(Book Sale continued from page 1)*

After much searching around the city, we found a new home at the Cubberley Community Center in a portable building erected just for us. That first sale in December 2002 looked more like a coalmine than a bookstore. The heat and electricity didn't yet work and our staff wore thick jackets and helmets with lamps on them to guide people through the darkness. Rainwater dripped in through the unsealed roofs. Customers crowded at the few windows to try to get enough light to examine books by. But the sale went on!

From there, the Cubberley book sale has grown apace. Earlier this year, the City Council helped us move our bargain and children's books into two additional rooms and an enclosed patio in the nearby K wing. Book donations have surged, as has the number of customers and monthly

sales revenue. Patrons tell us that they instinctively know to come on the second Saturday of each month to the book sale without any reminder. We now receive so many donated books that we've expanded the monthly sale into a two-day event (Sunday hours are from 1 to 4 pm). Between all three rooms, we now offer about 40,000 books, plus an assortment of records, DVDs, videotapes, CDs, and magazines.

The book sales are a huge success in many ways. One aim is to raise lots of money to help improve our libraries. Our sales at Cubberley have averaged about \$11,400 per month, but our largest so far was this very September, raising over \$15,200. This is about double what we earned five years ago.

Another goal of the sales is to recycle books. We estimate that we sell or give to other non-profits about 200,000 books and related items each year. This is a remarkable number when you consider that the entire Palo Alto Library system itself circulates about 245,000 items per branch annually. Of course, our books are sold rather than lent for free, but at prices often lower than a few days of overdue fine. And our sale is open just ten hours a month. You can imagine how hectic those hours are.



**Book sale volunteers recently gathered at Althea Andersen's home for a garden party.**

Our customers are fantastic. Many are from Palo Alto but others come from across the Bay or even farther. Realizing that some were patiently waiting hours in line at the main book sale room for the privilege of getting in first, we started handing them numbered tickets reserving their spot so that they could go visit the other sale rooms or just go back to sleep. Even so, at 8 a.m. on the morning of the Saturday sale, 40 or more people are typically waiting .. just for the tickets!

Our donors are marvelous. Many deliver books to us via the Palo Alto library branches or drop off large quantities at our main sales room. Over 1,000 people officially signed our

donor list in the last twelve months. Those who do, get a receipt for tax purposes and a thank-you letter from our organization.

The City Council deserves enormous thanks for helping us move into Cubberley and finding enough space for all of our books.

Then, there are our volunteers. About 125 folks from Palo Alto and neighboring cities volunteered over 13,000 hours just during the last twelve months to make the sale happen. Their energy and devotion are truly amazing. Some have even shown up on Labor Day and Christmas to help out. Many help to sort incoming books by subject in the ever-cramped processing room. Sorting is enormous fun and truly tests your knowledge of books. Should *I, Claudius* go under biography, historical fiction, or classics? Is *The Tipping Point* a business, sociology, or pop culture book?

Each of the 34 or so subjects has its own box in the sorting room, and once a box has filled, it is moved to the respective sale area. There, a specialist in that subject examines each book, deciding what to charge for it and which specific shelf it belongs on. Book Sale Manager Marty Paddock says each section very much reflects the personality of the volunteer who runs it. Books that have been on the shelf for a while may be marked down or sent to the bargain room. We also research books that are worth a lot, and then typically sell them for 1/3 of the comparable price on the Internet.

As the monthly sale date nears, other volunteers prepare publicity, advertising, and fliers. A whole cleaning crew comes through to vacuum and tidy up. There are even volunteers to coordinate and contact the other volunteers.

The day of the sale resembles a huge Broadway show. While the performance may look effortless to the audience, a million things are going on backstage to make it possible. Early in the morning, signs go out on the Cubberley campus to guide those who cannot park nearby (oh, for more parking!). The cashiers and helpers review their assignments and prepare for the onslaught of customers. By the time the main room opens at 11 a.m., the crowd has grown enormously and avidly rushes in. Security people at exit doors keep everything orderly. Behind the scenes, extra shopping bags are sent around, the cashiers are kept stocked with supplies, and the crew is refreshed with cookies, grapes, and bottled water.

As the sale progresses, new sets of volunteers come in to replace those on the first shift. The early hours tend to be the most crowded, so more cashiers are deployed in that period. Later action shifts over to the bargain room when, at 12:30 p.m., its prices fall by 50 percent. At 2 p.m., it begins to sell books at \$5 a bag.

*(Continued on page 4)*

**My mother and my father were illiterate immigrants from Russia. When I was a child they were constantly amazed that I could go to a building and take a book on any subject. They couldn't believe this access to knowledge we have here in America. They couldn't believe that it was free.**

**--Kirk Douglas**

*(Book Sale continued from page 3)*

As the sale day comes to an end, a fresh team takes over to tally the cash and checks. Volunteers informally compete to see who can best predict the sales total, which is e-mailed out to all. And then the signs come in, the lights are turned off, the rooms are checked one more time, and it's time to start thinking about the next sale.

You can help make our book sales even more wonderful by:

#### **Buying books**

- Upcoming sales are on October 9 and 10 and November 13 and 14.
- Saturday hours are 9 am to 4 pm, but the main sales room opens at 11 am.
- Sunday hours are 1 pm to 4 pm.

4000 Middlefield Road, Palo Alto, CA 94306 (Cubberley Community Center)

#### **Donating books**

- You can drop off a box or bag per day at any Palo Alto Library branch.
- You can bring larger donations to our room at the Cubberley Community Center from 2 pm to 4 pm Tuesday through Saturday

#### **Volunteering**

- See [www.friendspaloaltolib.org/join.htm#volunteer](http://www.friendspaloaltolib.org/join.htm#volunteer) or call Barbara Silberling, our volunteer recruiter, at (650) 856-1862.

**--Jeff Levinsky**

### **Kepler's Books Helps Palo Alto Libraries**

We'd like to thank Kepler's Books of Menlo Park for its support of Palo Alto libraries. If you mention "Friends of the Palo Alto Library" when purchasing at Kepler's, 10 percent of your purchase price will go to help the library. Five percent of your online purchases from Kepler's also will go to help the library if you first go to the Friends web site ([www.friendspaloaltolib.org](http://www.friendspaloaltolib.org)) and click on the word "Kepler's."

Kepler's opened in 1955 and is the largest independent bookstore in our area. Located at 1010 El Camino Real in Menlo Park, it hosts many author events.

**--Jeff Levinsky**



### **It's ALIVE @ your library!** **Main, Mitchell Lunch Services for Teens**

The Palo Alto City Library is focusing on expanding services to young teens. This fall, teens in grades 6 to 8 can discover new library services aimed at their special needs and interests.

At the Main Library, teens are welcome at a new Homework Help Center on Wednesday afternoons from 2 to 4:30 p.m. Two experienced homework helpers will be available to help middle school students with math, language arts, social studies, science and health assignments. Librarians will be available as well to help with research needs. The Homework Help Center is funded by generous grants from the Friends of the Palo Alto Library and the Palo Alto Weekly Holiday Fund.

The Library will celebrate "Teen Read Week" October 17 - 23 with special displays and activities at the Mitchell Park and Main libraries. Teen Read Week is sponsored by the Young Adult Library Services Association of the American Library Association. With the theme this year of "It's ALIVE @your library," its purpose is to promote and celebrate recreational reading for teens.

A new Teen Library Advisory Board (T-LAB) is being established. Under the guidance of youth services librarians, teens will meet monthly to suggest new library materials, plan programs, create displays and develop ideas to make the library more teen-friendly.

With recommendations from the members of T-LAB, Library staff will focus on creating spaces at Mitchell Park and Main that are welcoming and appropriate for the special needs of young teens. The Library is seeking funding in the form of grants, gifts and donations to help support physical improvements and enhanced services for teens. The Library is also interested in finding community partners in its effort to reach out to teens and to advocate for their special needs.

For more information about teen services at the Palo Alto City Library, and how and you can help, please contact Library Director Paula Simpson at 329-2403, or [paula.simpson@cityofpaloalto.org](mailto:paula.simpson@cityofpaloalto.org).

**--Paula Simpson**



## MEMBERSHIP NEWS

(This membership news covers the period of April to September 2004.)

Please look for your renewal date on the address label and please stay with the Friends. We need you more than ever, not only for your monetary contributions but also for your volunteer efforts and your voice as a library supporter.

A warm welcome to new members:

Katherine Abu-Romia, Craig & Diane Allen, Kendra Anderson, Lois & Eddie Anderson, Juan Arenas, Mary & Amy Atkinson, Gvido & Rasma Augusts, Gundars V. Augusts, Tom Ayres, Bill & Laureen Baker, Pat & Penny Barrett, Mike & Bonnie Beaver, Ed Berkowitz, Enrico & Jane Bernasconi, Debra Black, James Blume, Toni Bowes, Rick & Laurie Boyles, Carolyn & Richard Brennan, Iris Brest, Ralph & Betty Britton, Thomas Brodene, Adria & Beau Brown, Ursula Bujanovich, Brian Bullis, Gary Bush, Ricardo Bustos, Maurice Campbell, Sau Yee Chan, Elizabeth & Richard Chapman, Cynthia Chin-Lee, Jan Civlin, Patricia A. Coleman, Nancy Coupens, Ms. Michael Cowan, Sarah Curtis, Shari Dekelboum, Mike Duran, Meredith Einaudi, Alfred & Frances Escherich, Rob & Andrew Fitzgerald, Jennifer Flanagan, Kris & Steve Geiger, Dennis Gerlits, Kelvin Godshall, Dan Gorman, Mike & Janet Gusman, Alvin P. & Rose Mary Hall, James Hartley, Kay & Walt Hays, Joyce McClure & Andy Hertzfeld, Victoria M. Hoekstra, Liz & Terry Hogan, Peter & Gloria Hom, Janel Hopper, Brent Jenson, Stephanie Bodoff & Joseph Ferrandiz, Joy & Herb Kaiser, Bryan Kember, Marie Kitajima, Amy & Keith Krehbiel, Iris E. Kriegler, Ginny Coles & Lance Wahler, Kenneth I. Laws, Elaine Lieberman, Claire Lin, Jeff Lindberg, Suzanne B. Little, Rosemary Lombard, Margo & Stephen Manley, Stephanie Martinson, Gerry Masteller, Everett Mathews, Victoria V. Matias, John & Lisa McClenny, William E. & Jean W. McFadden, Timothy McGinnis, John Meador, Frances Mello, Francois Ducaroir & Michela Dell'olio, Jim & Susan Morris, Lawrence Morrissey, P.J. & Sharon Murphy, Percy Mussells, Silvia Nemeyer, Eileen & Marty Neumeier, Eric Newman, Victor & Ursula Nielepko, Janet Owens, Tammi Padilla, Barbara Peterson, Young Pham, Phuong Pham, Robert Phippard, Kathleen Politzer, Marie Randall, Gloria Reade, Frances Riley, Denise Rios, Lisa Lawrence & Robert March, Susan Rosenberg, Elena Saydekova, Viviane Schupbach, Alex R. Shimkunas, Mark Shipley, Marilyn A. Shurtz, Kristin Siciliano, Gina M. Signorello, Kathy Simpson, Ajay Singh, Alex Situitsky, Ray Skinner, Debbie Smith, Marie-Louise Starling-Bell, Peter & Judith Steinhart, Eileen Steinkamp, John & Gail Stucky, Keith Swick,

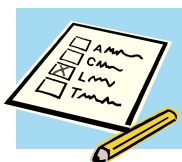
Lesley Kalmin & Todd Newman, Van Tran, Geetha Swamy & K. Umamageswaran, Ron Unz, Prisciliano Vasquez, Charlotte Villemoes, Greg Walker, Peer Wedvick, Sandra Welch, Barbara A. Whyte, Ronald & Melanie Wilensky, Bartholomew Wilger, Charlotte & Bob Wilson, Paul Wood, Hedwig Yanell

Welcome also to **Stanford Federal Credit Union**, our corporate member!

A big "thank you" to returning members:

Lucille Adams, Alice Barlow, Carolyn Barnes, Louise & Stuart Beattie, Bruce & Mary Bess, Ann Boeckling, Marda F Buchholz, Helen & Carl Bunje, Marilyn & Robert Burnes, Katie Cho, Richard Ciapponi, Barbara Cleveland, Shirley Coates, Tom & Marge Collins, Richard Cullen, Consilia E. D'andrea, Star Teachout & Daniel Adams, Kathleen Davenport, Vaughn & Charlotte Deline, Hilary Donahue, Shirley A. Finrock, Carl Finrock, Richard & Sydney Frankel, William Frye, Crystal D Gamage, Floyd & Sandy Gardner, Sylvia Gartner, Irving Gold, Doug & Verna Graham, Joan & Ben Grammar, Dr. Myrna S. Green, Alice Painter Gross, Jo Guttadauro, Mickey Hamilton, Margaret & Van Harvey, Paul Herk, Imogene & Richard Hilbers, Bob & Susan Hoerger, Tacy & Glen Huffman, Mary Johnson, Linda Johnson, Barbara Zimmer & Kevin Mayer, Sheila Kingston, Marian Knox, Ed & Miriam Landesman, Chris Larsen, Rosalie Lefkowitz, Sam Leong, Helen Leppert, Jeff Levinsky, Joseph Lewis, Bernice & Marvin Loeb, Doris & Don Lorents, Barbara & William Lucas, Gwen Luce, Dallas & Larry Manning, Alison & Alan Marer, Michael Marinacci, Richard & Patricia H. McEwen, Paula McFarland, James & Dorothy Mellberg, Ruth & Philip Meyerson, Brenda Miller, Robert Moss, Jan Murphy, Jean & Bryan Myers, Randall & Julaine Neff, Nancy Neff & Family, William F. & Rosemary P. Nichols, Frances Nitzberg, Howard & Judith Ocken, Jack & Lois Ohms, Angela Owen, Martha B Paddock, Emmy Lou & John Papagni, Anne Peck, Susan J Perry, Helen & Joseph F Pickering, K R & Arsella Dahl Raman, Raymond Raza, Ida Rose Reed, Robert & Diane Reklis, Myrna & Leon Rochester, Ann Roper, Patricia J Saffir, John S. Scheibe, Robert & Georgia Schwaar, Gary Seath, Larry Shapiro, Charles & Claire Shoens, Marilyn, Dale & Rick Simbeck, Sylvia J Smitham, Steven Staiger, Marilyn Stoddard, Barbara & Kevin Susco, Eric & Allison Taborek, Carol & Ludwig Tannenwald, Louise Thursby, Veronica S. Tincher, Patricia Sohl & Torben Gronning, Terry Trumbull, Ann Vogel, Jerry & Bobbie Waggar, Herbert A Weidner, Alan Weller, Sarah & George Wheaton, Raymond R White Ph.D, Bruce Wilner, David Womack, Joshua Wong, and Margaret Worland.

-- *Membership Committee*



## Board Members Nominated

**Althea Andersen, Gretchen Emmons, Gerry Masteller, Bob Moss, Gloria Reade, Steve Staiger and Ellen Wyman** will be re-nominated for the Friends of the Library Board of Directors at the annual meeting October 27. The nominating committee also is proposing two new candidates: **Rudy Batties**, a Palo Alto resident since 1981 who holds a Stanford MBA and works in strategic marketing for technology companies, and **Jim Schmidt**, a professor of Library and Information Sciences at San Jose State University and former University Librarian. All of these directors are nominated for two-year terms.

Nominations for board officers for 2005 are **Jeff Levinsky**, President; **Wendy Akers-Ghose**, Vice-President; **Martha Schmidt**, Secretary; **Bob Moss**, Treasurer; and **Bob Otnes**, Assistant Treasurer.

-- *Barbara Silberling*



## Stanford Federal Credit Union: Our New Friend

We're proud to announce a new member of the Friends at the \$1,000 corporate level: the Stanford Federal Credit Union. The credit union, a non-profit organization with 40,000 members, normally offers accounts and loans only to people affiliated with Stanford and certain employers. However, all members of the Friends of the Palo Alto Library are now eligible to join the credit union as well. To join the credit union or get more information, check its web site, [www.sfcu.org](http://www.sfcu.org), or call (650) 723-2509.

--*Jeff Levinsky*



## Hospital Resuscitates Abused Books

Books do not lead easy lives. Fresh off the press, many make it to loving homes where they give pleasure to their owners, being read and reread many times. Other books end up on library shelves from where they move through many hands to many homes--and quite a few of these hands not

only are careless about the way they handle a book but often savagely mistreat it.

The Mends Department of the Palo Alto Library daily receives and attends to victims of such abuse: books with torn covers or torn or missing pages; books with broken spines and with damage from water, coffee or soft drink spills; books with pet and children's teeth marks, with comments written on the margins in pen or pencil or with underlined text; and books whose pictures have been cut out or with drawings on the fly leaves.

Other damage is the result of odd items used as bookmarks: leaves, blades of grass, a slice of salami or a sticky candy wrapper. Other, non-damaging items that have been found in returned books include boarding passes, grocery lists, drug prescriptions, credit card charge slips, parts of personal letters and unused postage stamps.

The Mends Department receives damaged books from all branches of the Palo Alto library system and whether the item is for juveniles or adults, the natures of injuries tend to be the same. New books are mistreated as much as are those that have been in circulation for quite a while. Librarians and volunteers such as myself repair as many as we possibly can on site. In 2003, the records show that we processed 4,252 volumes. In addition we sent 465 to an off-site bindery to be completely redone.

The time and cost it takes to do this work is difficult to assess. While I have spent an average of three hours per week since 1991 as a volunteer to help Bernice Sakuma, library specialist in charge of Mends, the main burden of the work is on her shoulders. This includes not just the physical work such as replacing broken bindings, tipping in loose pages, replacing missing or torn pages with photocopies from other intact copies, re-sewing broken bindings and keeping records, but also deciding which repairs can be done on site and which have to be sent out, and supervising and training volunteers.

Therefore, dear reader, treat library books with respect and they will repay you with many hours of pleasure and relaxation--and save your tax money, too.

-- *Angela M. Owen*



## The Impermanence of Knowledge

I love libraries. But I'm kind of worried about their future--and it just isn't libraries but the nature of information and knowledge in this wired world.

When I was young I thought of libraries as temples of revealed wisdom. The grownups had learned all these things and had left this wonderful legacy of their knowledge archived in the endless shelves stretching before my little hands. Somewhere in those dusty books was everything I could ever hope to know. It was awesome.

Now I'm older, and I think less wise. Most of the knowledge that I had gained as a youth has turned out to be faulty. For example, I thought I knew about atomic physics. I had a clear picture of electrons like billiard balls circling a bunch of grapes in the nucleus. The world was a simple, explainable place. Knowledge had a permanency. Now I realize that knowledge itself is transitory and often of questionable validity. The billiard ball metaphor in my mind has melted into a fog of uncertainty. Knowledge won't sit still, and it isn't just forging new frontiers, but it's also constantly being rewritten.

Now when I visit libraries I'm suspicious. I love the ambiance and even the smell, but I'm wary about those books. In the fields that I know, I see books that are obsolete and even wrong. Unfortunately, this is most of the books. I think that a librarian should go through and remove those decayed books. Maybe they should put a little sticker on the shelf for a placeholder. "The book that previously occupied this space, (name of book), has been judged to have become useless, wrong, and misleading."

Some years ago at a talk I gave at the Library of Congress, and I told the people there that they had too many books. Needless to say, this opinion was unwelcome. But the problem is, amidst all the junk, how am I to find the "good stuff." Moreover, even the "good stuff" has a way of turning sour, and who is to judge what is good anyway? I saw a good example of this innate knowledge pollution when my company closed its library at my lab. (Something that's happening all too often these days.) The company announced that as of a certain day the library would be closed permanently, and that on that day all books would be available to be taken. I looked forward to this unique opportunity to get free books.

On the appointed morning I waited in a small crowd as the library door was thrown open for the impending pillage. As I raced in I saw the people who had been in front of me forging their way out with their arms full of books. Quickly, I scanned the shelves. Though there were obvious gaps now, most books still remained. I looked and I looked, but I couldn't find a single thing worth carrying out. Later in the afternoon I returned. The library was empty of people, but most of the books were still there. No one wanted those lonely volumes. This was a true test of the value of the archive, and, of course, it was a destructive test.

The library has been a venerable social institution. Since the time of the Library of Alexandria in the second century BC, it has been an enduring concept. After all those centuries, it is now being threatened by World Wide Web. Now we have

a virtual library at our fingertips with seemingly infinite shelves and a searchable index. However, the books on those shelves are changed every day. Books disappear, new ones appear, and others are revised. The average life of a web page is only six to seven weeks. I think of the books in the physical libraries as analogous to hardware, and those in the virtual library as software. Furthermore, unlike the books in the physical libraries, there is seldom any standard of review. It's too easy to publish.

I am intrigued by the idea of archiving the web, of being able to go back in time and mine the history of what people were saying in the past. There are several ongoing attempts to do this. The Internet Archive Wayback Machine has archived pages from 1996 (charmingly, it has a mirror in Alexandria, Egypt), and the British Library is now archiving pages "of social and historical importance." There are, of course, problems with copyright and with the preservation of things that, retrospectively, people don't want to be remembered. Nevertheless, there has to be value somewhere in that vast, accumulating pile of electronic sludge.

I'm bothered by the ephemeral nature of information today. Way down in my stomach I wish that my assimilated knowledge would sit still. Beethoven isn't rewriting his symphonies every day, and Leonardo isn't using Photoshop to revise his Mona Lisa. And secretly I still think of electrons as being like little billiard balls.

--Robert Lucky

*Reprinted with permission from the March 2004 issue of IEEE Spectrum Magazine.*



## Commissioners Back Saturday Hours

When the City Council June 28 allocated \$35,000 to the library, with restoration of Saturday hours at the Downtown branch in mind, it asked the Library Advisory Commission to review the issue and make a recommendation back to the Council. The commission met July 22 and discussed the issue at length, including how much the Saturday service would cost (the Council Budget Committee was told just \$17,800 last year). All seven commissioners voted to recommend to the Council that the funds be used to cover the Saturday hours. The formal recommendation is scheduled to be drafted and voted on at the Sept. 30 commission meeting and then sent on to the Council. We appreciate the commissioners' support on this issue and are eager to have the Downtown Library reopen soon for Saturday customers.

--Jeff Levinsky

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**ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED**

**Web Page: [www.friendspaloaltolib.org](http://www.friendspaloaltolib.org)**

**Monthly Book Sales: Second Saturday**

Cubberley Community Center, 4000 Middlefield Rd.

**Saturday**

Main room: 11 am to 4pm

(Free tickets to reserve place in line available at 8 am)

Children's (Room K6) & Bargain (Room K7): 9 am to 4pm

**Sunday**

All rooms: 1 pm to 4 pm

See [www.friendspaloaltolib.org](http://www.friendspaloaltolib.org) for details

**Library Commission: Fourth Thursday**

Council Conference Room, 250 Hamilton Ave. 7 p.m.

See [www.city.palo-alto.ca.us/clerk/schedule.html](http://www.city.palo-alto.ca.us/clerk/schedule.html)  
to confirm meeting date and time.

**Board of Directors Meeting: First Wednesday**

Cubberley Book Sale Room  
4000 Middlefield Road 8:30 to 10:30 a.m.

**Email: [info@friendspaloaltolib.org](mailto:info@friendspaloaltolib.org)**

**Book Discussion Group: Second Thursday**

Lucie Stern Community Center Fireside Room  
1305 Middlefield Road 7:30 to 9 p.m.

For information, call Crystal 961-1528 or see  
[www.fopalbookgroup.homestead.com](http://www.fopalbookgroup.homestead.com)

(In November, meets instead on Third Thursday)

**Great Books: Second Wednesday**

Oak Creek Apartments Club House  
1600 Sand Hill Road, Palo Alto. 7:30 to 9:30 p.m.  
For information, call Elsie Taboroff at 493-8629

**History Book Discussion Group**

For information, call Floyd Gardner (9 a.m. to 7 p.m.) at 328-8855

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