

## Our Libraries Open Doors to Many Places

Benjamin Franklin once said about libraries that they afforded him, “. . . the means of improvement by constant study.” He felt that libraries were a basic necessity to educate the people. Franklin and other leaders of his community gathered their resources together and founded the Library Company in Philadelphia. It was through the construction of this public library that the United States would be forever changed. It was a milestone in the educational history of our nation.

Libraries create an opportunity for anyone to gain knowledge and better themselves. They give people a chance to learn about the world around them and to make unbiased decisions on important issues. When a person walks into a library, their income, career and background become invisible. Not only do libraries create opportunity, they give ordinary citizens power to make changes that can affect us all.

With a simple library card, one has access to a wealth of information and many resources. The libraries within District IV include Concord, Clayton and Pleasant Hill. All offer a variety of community activities. Preschool story times, book clubs, movie nights and knitting clubs are just some of the activities for people to get involved with at these libraries.

I believe that libraries are essential to all communities. With funds from my end-of-year office budget surplus, the Library Connection at Monument Futures installed a computer that cardholders can use to reserve library materials, delivered weekly. This is an important step in bringing the Monument Corridor into the larger community and in better educating residents of all ages. Many of the area’s individuals do not have the means to get to another library branch, and many of them speak little or no English. It is essential for the well being of the community that all residents have such resources available to them, which can motivate and challenge them. I am proud that our County library system, headed by Anne Cain, was able to recognize a need, find a solution and that I was given an opportunity to help make that solution a reality.

Within the last two years, I have allocated over \$80,000 to the Contra Costa County Library System. The County library used these funds to aide in the Book Delivery System, Teen Reading effort and Project Second Chance. Such programs have had positive impacts upon many of our fellow friends and neighbors.

Contra Costa County has done an exceptional job of transforming our libraries into important educational assets that our residents are excited to use. There was a time, not too long ago, when our libraries were in decline. Patronage was falling and libraries were competing with the rise of the mega-bookstore and the establishment of the Internet. Yet, through great effort and determination, we have made our libraries work again. They will continue to be there as an important resource for our community.

Whatever your passion, the library has a book about it. Libraries have the power to unlock motivations and spark interests that you may never have known existed. Whether it is the history of baseball, a treatise on the transmission of the influenza virus or the story of dinosaurs that run amuck in a Jurassic-era theme-park, libraries can open up a world of ideas, brighten imaginations and focus the mind. If you have not been in a while, visit one. You may be surprised at what you find.

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