



Jim  
Gosney

Local History  
YAKIMA HERALD-REPUBLIC

## Library wins Dana Award for youth program

IT'S UNDERSTANDABLE if the name John Cotton Dana doesn't mean anything to you.

It probably shouldn't, unless libraries are your stock in trade. And if they are, you know all about the Dana Awards.

Because they are the equivalent, in terms of recognition and prestige, of the Oscars, the Emmys, the Pulitzers. Few libraries win Dana Awards, which honor outstanding achievement in the promotion of library services, and when one does, it is a significant event.

Our library — the word "our" is important here — has just won a Dana Award.

It is the library's second Dana Award; the other came in 1951.

The citation accompanying the award states:  
"For designing a delightful, fun-filled "Silly Sum-

mer" reading program utilizing humor and imaginative graphics to encourage children to read for pleasure rather than competition."

CREDIT, NATURALLY, should go to every librarian within the region's 20 branches, but there was a driving force behind the effort. In this case, it is Karen Dirkse, Youth Services coordinator.

"She tries to shunt off the credit to other people," says library Director Richard Ostrander, "but she's the one who pulled it all together. We wouldn't have won the award had it not been for her."

Ostrander is correct. Karen indeed does try to minimize her role in the award-winning program.

But Ostrander is her boss, and Karen Dirkse will be in San Francisco to accept the Dana Award at the American Library Association's conference in late June. She'll accept it because Ostrander insists.

TO UNDERSTAND the significance of the award, it is necessary to consider the nature of public libraries,

and their functions, and their promise. It is necessary, too, to consider how libraries attract, encourage, and foment a life-long love for reading.

Which is, of course, a library's essential purpose, its reason for existence.

To this end, Dirkse's "Silly Summer" program of attracting youngsters throughout the Yakima Valley to the enjoyment of reading — for enjoyment alone — was impressive. She estimates more than 2,500 youngsters from the age of 5 to 11 participated, drawn to the libraries by the promise of summer-long entertainment.

"We wanted a wide program that would involve a great many kids," Karen said. "We wanted to encourage the kids to read for the fun of it rather than for education."

"Also, we tried to stress an informal relationship with library personnel. Because a library is supposed to be a place where they can relax, entertain themselves, and learn on their own, at their own pace."

UNDER DIRKSE'S direction, the "Silly Summer" program effectively humanized the libraries for the youngsters. Libraries became entertainment centers, where games could be played, mysteries solved, and youthful enthusiasm was not only tolerated, but encouraged.

"We don't want kids to think a library is an institution, that it's a place where you have to be absolutely quiet. We don't want kids to grow up with that sort of feeling at all," she said.

That the program proved its effectiveness is obvious. The John Cotton Dana Award, one of the most prestigious available, confirms it. And now that "our" library has two Dana Awards, Ostrander believes they should come even more frequently.

"Karen and the other librarians put a lot of work into that program, and it took a great deal more work just to prepare the entry," Ostrander said. "And she's going to San Francisco to accept the award. She gives credit to everybody else, but it wouldn't have happened without her. She got it for us."



DIRKSE

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