

Editorials

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Anne Haley, Library's Director, Will Be Missed

The Yakima Valley Regional Library has long been in good hands, but we'll say without reservation that Anne Haley still leaves some particularly big shoes to fill when she retires as the system's director at the end of June.

One might think that her five-year tenure is rather short in the total scheme of things, but take it from those of us who have followed the library — they have been some pretty hectic, challenging and ultimately rewarding years. And Haley has had a huge impact, both as the director of the local library system and chair of the Washington State Library Commission.

In the latter post she literally led the fight to save the state library slated to be axed as part of a state budget crunch earlier this year. The library, which boasts a wealth of state history, will now be transferred to the secretary of state's office.

She has been a staunch, effective defender of the First Amendment, particularly during a fuss over whether the library's Internet access should feature pornography filters.

Haley gives a lot of credit to her staff for helping sort through citizen demands for Internet filters — a difficult balancing of First Amendment and educational freedoms and the rights of parents.

The library now requires minors to have a signed consent form from parents to use unfiltered computer terminals.

It's a workable solution, she said, but filters block "free access" for those too poor to own computers to information essential to education and citizen participation in government — "to make decisions particularly in public debates that are the bedrock of democracy."

Haley was simply the right person for the times after long-time director Richard Ostrander, whom Haley refers to as her mentor, retired. With a keen gift of finding grant money — more than \$840,000 in grants in five years — Haley has brought the hum of computer technology to a library system facing ever greater demands.

An online data system and upgrades in customer services and a circulation system have led to a "change of culture" at the library, Haley said.

"We have moved from being warehousemen of books to guides and trainers of people seeking information," she said.

The library system must be equipped to flow with the Yakima Valley's changing demographics, particularly a growing number of Spanish-speaking immigrants, and a changing economy.

With the Yakima Valley's high rates of poverty and illiteracy, the library has never been more needed, she said.

"Our challenge is to touch, figuratively, each person who lives in this county and also to ensure our products and services are relevant and used," she said.

Haley, who came to Yakima in 1997 from Walla Walla after nearly 20 years as a library director there, is ending a 32-year career with public libraries. Now she'll travel some with husband Jim Shepherd, a Whitman College economics professor.

And while she'll be missed here, we have a hunch she won't miss that weekly Yakima-Walla Walla commute she's maintained during her time here.