CONTRA COSTA COUNTY LIBRARY COMMISSION
AGENDA ATTACHMENT 3

MEETING DATE: Thursday, May 19, 2011
AGENDA ITEM #: 9
ITEM: CORRESPONDENCE

RECOMMENDED ACTION:

- None
Guest Commentary:  
County library system a true medicine chest of knowledge

By Walter Ruehlig  
For Contra Costa Times  

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If Cicero were right that if you have a garden and a library you have everything you need, then maybe Contra Costa County isn’t doing so bad after all.

Seems that just when you maybe thought that the county library system had surpassed reinvention, it outdoes itself again. Little wonder, then, that the 26-branch organization is in the running for national library system of the year honors. We’ll know that outcome, incidentally, in early May.

Think of it; despite shrinking revenues affecting new material purchases, we are on track to break 7 million circulation by June 30, the fiscal year end. Seems we just topped the magical 5 million barrier and then soon thereafter exceeded the 6 million marker. To boot, the county library website got more than 3 million virtual visits last year.

Along the way, the library keeps adding astonishing adaptations like the national trailblazing three Library-a-Go-Go automated book dispensers at BART and shopping malls; LINK+, which allows users to order a book from more than 20 library systems and a 23 million collection throughout California and Nevada; the option of having books mailed directly to your home; online student homework help with expert tutors; the ‘Opposing Viewpoints Database’ and the Gayle Virtual Reference Library.

How about story time podcasts, audio or e-books, or the options of posing a question to your local librarian by phone, text or chat line?

Or the Brainfuse Adult Learning Center that offers practice exam test centers in General Educational Development (GED) or citizenship, live Microsoft Office tutoring, or 24-hour turnaround critiques of your resume.

The latest iteration, ‘Discover and Go,’ is one of my favorites, though. Simply go online and you can reserve free or discounted tickets to more than 30 Bay Area museums and cultural institutions, including the likes of the Asian Art Museum of San Francisco, Blackhawk Museum, California Shakespeare Theater, Cartoon Art Museum, Chabot Space and Science Center, Lawrence Hall of Science, San Francisco Zoo, The Tech Museum in San Jose and, for something completely different, the USS Hornet Museum. I can happily report that the family and I just got back from the Charles M. Schulz Museum in Santa Rosa.

Arcade junkie? We’ve got the Pacific Pinball Museum in Alameda to set your wheels spinning. How about visiting the California Academy of Sciences in Golden Gate Park, the only place on the planet with an aquarium, planetarium, natural history museum and a four-story tall rain forest; all sharing one roof with more than 40,000 live animals.

We Antioch folks are particularly blessed that the county has funded staff for a second city library at Prewett Park. The adjacent Gateway Learning Center 20-station computer lab is a bonus, as is the fact that the two Antioch facilities are staggered their hours to stretch public availability.

Of course, the modestly sized library has a limited selection, but it was built so that expansion could easily take place. Remember, too, one can order a book from anywhere in our current library system to be dropped off in two to three days at Prewett.

Borrowing from other joined systems would, naturally, take longer.

To connect to this fascinating matrix come in person, call 900-984-4636, or go to www.ccclib.org.

Given all the angst befalling our town, our state, our country and our world, the county library good news is a refreshing tonic. It echoes the inscription at the famed library of Thebes; “Libraries, the medicine chest of the soul.”

Walter Ruehlig is the Antioch representative on the Contra Costa County Library Commission.