

By Dick Myers

The regional library had its budget cut by 25 percent, or \$131,792. That cut comes on top of an earlier \$40,000 hit. Library officials say the cuts will have a serious impact on their ability to provide services to the local libraries of the region, including those in Charles County.

To accommodate that major budget reduction, the regional library employees met recently and decided to shut down all operations for 22 days, Nov. 25-30, Dec. 23-Jan. 6 and two additional weeks later in the fiscal year.

These fiscal do not directly affect operating hours of each local library, according to SMRLA Director Katherine Hurrey. But they do affect services, she said, because SMRLA provides many services that each library in the system is not able to handle itself.

During the SMRLA shutdown local libraries will not have inter-library loans available. The regional library facilitates sharing of the books and materials for the whole system. If one library does not have a particular book but another in the region or state does, SMRLA finds and provides it to the local library for its customer.

The regional library, located in Charlotte Hall, recently installed an on-line system called COSMOS, which speeds the process of locating materials from another library or source. County and state funding went into it. That COSMOS system and all other on-line searching and the dial-up reference service available at each library will not be in use during the times SMRLA is closed.

The budget cuts have also put a halt in SMRLA's purchase of videos, audio cassettes, films and all but a few essential books. The regional library has served to buy more costly resource materials which one county system would be unable to afford on its own.

Left after the budget cuts, says Hurrey, are monies for essential, non-negotiable items such as electricity, telephones, insurance and other contracted services, plus reduced staff salaries.

She said the dates for SMRLA closings were selected to coincide with school closings. Students are heavy users of the libraries for homework assignments and research projects. Hurrey admitted, however, that the holidays are also a time for heavy use of the local libraries, and the closing can't help but impact on the people who use them.

The cry unuttered is the loudest.

—19th century Hasidic teacher.

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