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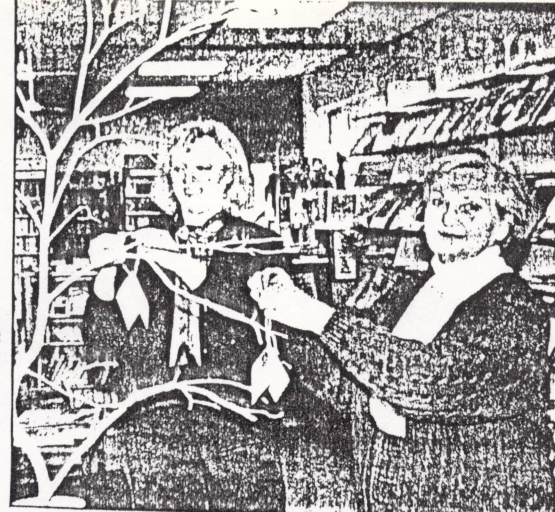


Photo by Martha Mastracco

Mary Reggin, right, and Lorraine Hartline set up the gift tree in the La Plata branch library.

Library plants seeds in hopes for tree

Volunteers look for donations to offset large budget cuts

By MARTHA MASTRACCO
Independent Staff Writer

Despite an 18 percent cut in the materials budget, some regular library patrons predict growth in book and tape collections as spring approaches. Through a gift tree planted at each branch, visitors can purchase and donate specific book titles from the library's wish list.

The newly formed Friends of the Charles County Public Library, a core group of about 20 volunteers, planted the seeds for the project during an organizational meeting.

"It's an opportunity for people to contribute things that the library really needs," said David Saxton, acting president of the Friends. "The tree presents an opportunity for people to walk into the library and meet a specific request."

Organization members Mary Reggin and Lorraine Hartline set out to install the gift tree at the La Plata branch this week. As they threaded white yarn through the bare branches and pink tags marked with titles, the tree branched out with hopes for well-stocked shelves in the months to come.

"When times get tougher, libraries do get busier," said Linda Gateau, liaison between the Friends and the library system. "In terms of buying power, the library has been steadily losing ground, yet the demand for library services is higher than ever."

Each branch submitted a list of 100 most-requested materials, from children's books to best sellers. After an item has been purchased, the name of the donor will be placed on a bookplate, and the title will begin circulating in the library system.

The brunt of the 5.5 percent library spending cut fell on the materials budget. According to Gateau, only prepaid subscriptions (vital to the continuity of reference files) and a smaller number of the most popular titles will be ordered under the budget.

In another measure to curtail spending, each branch has arranged to close for one week during February. Gateau said that the system has not added any new

positions in almost 10 years. Some existing positions have been downgraded to save on salary expenditures. The Glymont branch library was closed permanently last fall.

The Charles County Library System ranks 22nd among the 24 jurisdictions in Maryland for the amount spent on the library per capita.

"People tend to take their libraries for granted," Gateau said. "They think that the libraries will always be there for them. But that may not always be true."

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A gift tree has been set up in the main library at Route 6 and Garrett Street in La Plata, as well as in the P.D. Brown location at Smallwood Village Center, Waldorf, and the Bryans Road branch at Bryans Road Shopping Center.

The Friends of the Charles County Public Library will sponsor a book sale in April. The group's first election of officers will take place in May.

Those interested in joining the organization can pick up a mail-in membership application at any local branch. Personal membership is \$10; family membership is \$15. The non-profit group has its next monthly meeting Feb. 19 at 7 p.m. at the La Plata library.

By the time spring arrives in Southern Maryland, the Friends hope their gift trees will be filled.