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Letters

Closing a library

To the Editor:

Rebecca Sturm, in "When Closing a Library is Progress" (*C&RL News*, September 1988), seems to be asking: Does a library facility a library make?

I would answer no. It is the librarian who makes the difference! Sturm mentions that the Library Referral Center consisted of a "small...book collection...some subscriptions...staffing by student employees for 20 hours per week."

Contrast that with the far more successful and innovative efforts in small, scattered office locations in Vermont (see *C&RL News*, April 1987, pp.181-83) which offered a *reference librarian*, a facsimile machine, telephone, and a small collection. This description fits well with my own experience at a small regional vocational/technical college in Indiana. It is the reference work I do, the teaching of library skills (in classrooms and in the library), the work with faculty that has brought a

poorly used collection to new life as an active library—one that serves its patrons well. And it is the knowledge of information sources outside the library that the professional has which further increases student and faculty access to desired information.

Perhaps the Library Referral Center was never actually a library?—*Donna Gagnier-Chisholm, Indiana Vocational Technical College, Fort Wayne, Indiana.*

The Gourman Report

To the Editor:

The EBSS Bibliographic Instruction for Education Committee has produced a useful addition to the literature with their "Teaching Library and Information Retrieval Skills to Academic Administrators and Support Staff" in the April 1988 issue. However, in scanning the section on Reference Tools, I note that under Academic Rankings they

include two of Jack Gourman's publications. Our Reference Department spent some time investigating these materials a few years ago, due to a complaint from one of our Deans. We were led to several very critical reviews, on the basis of which we no longer recommend the use of these publications. We even tried to contact Mr. Gourman by ordinary mail and by registered mail and received no answer to either communication.—*Rita Edwards, Reference Librarian, Adelphi University, Garden City, New York.*

Professional communication

To the Editor:

At last the unmentionable has been mentioned. Jonathan D. Lauer (*C&RL News*, July/August 1988, p.441) has confessed to yawning and fuming through library meetings, partly because the speakers are inarticulate drones.

But he has shown us only half of the picture. The rest of our professional communication is hardly less infuriating or soporific. Who of us does not pick up each library journal issue with a heavy heart? [Except, of course, *C&RL News*.—Ed.] We have

to open it, we have to scan the table of contents, we have to begin to read some of the pieces because they may contain factual material of importance to us; but by all means let's skim the surface as quickly as possible, or we'll be stuck in the quagmires of their laborious complexities and repetitions. No one goes to the library literature to enjoy a Shavian wit or a Hemingway pungency, but at least we might hope to find there sentences that are clear and moderately interesting.

As Mr. Lauer says, there are classes on every campus to help us write English rather than jargon. And if we will not visit the guru, at least we can invite the guru to visit us. In a recent year our campus librarians' association arranged two programs on the two kinds of communication, addressed respectively by a lecturer from the Theatre Department and the editor of an in-house journal. At least the first speaker (I was the second) was inspiring.

Or are Selth and Lauer way off-base on all this? Are decent writing and speaking too much to expect from a profession based on the recorded word?—*Jefferson P. Selth, University of California, Riverside.* ■■

Fifty-year celebration at the University of Virginia

The University of Virginia Libraries, in conjunction with the celebration of the fiftieth anniversary of Alderman Library's opening, have added their three millionth book, Diderot's *Encyclopédie*. The thirty-five volume edition of the *Encyclopédie* was given to the University of Virginia by Douglas H. Gordon. Taking its name from the philosopher and dynamic leader of the Enlightenment, Denis Diderot, whose contribution to the work was pervasive over twenty years, the *Encyclopédie* was one of the most brilliant literary enterprises of the 18th century. Accompanying the edition are a unique set of uncensored proofs with corrections in Diderot's own hand, other manuscript notes, and associated documents reflecting the controversial publication (1751–1772) of this monumental work.

The University's book collections, which began in 1824 with 8,000 volumes selected chiefly by Thomas Jefferson, were housed in the University's Rotunda until 1938. Edgar Allan Poe was among the first student class to use the Rotunda Library, and he dutifully paid a 58-cent fine for overdue books.

In 1895, a fire completely gutted the Rotunda; two-thirds of the collection, then numbering 57,000 volumes, was lost. As a result, the surviving books were housed in the Brooks Museum for sev-

eral years during the construction of a new Rotunda interior designed by New York architect, Stanford White. The next few years witnessed great increases in donations, however. The depleted collection was soon replaced, and by 1924 overcrowding had prompted the University's President, Edwin A. Alderman, to call for a million-dollar library to house the 131,422 volumes that had accumulated since the Rotunda fire.

Formal planning for such a structure began soon after the arrival in 1927 of the University's tenth librarian, Harry Clemons, but economic conditions during the Depression prevented substantial progress toward actual construction. In 1935, President John Lloyd Newcomb turned to the Public Works Administration for assistance. Alumnus R.E. Lee Taylor, a partner in the architectural firm Taylor & Fisher, undertook the design, and John Kevin Peebles Jr., supervised much of the construction. The Library, named for President Alderman, was dedicated during commencement in June of 1938, and it remains the central humanities and social sciences library of the University.

The University Libraries are currently ranked 25th in size among American and Canadian libraries in the annual Association of Research Libraries statistics. ■■

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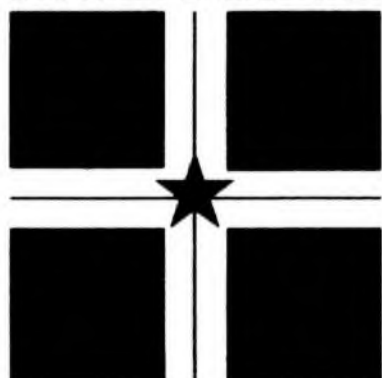
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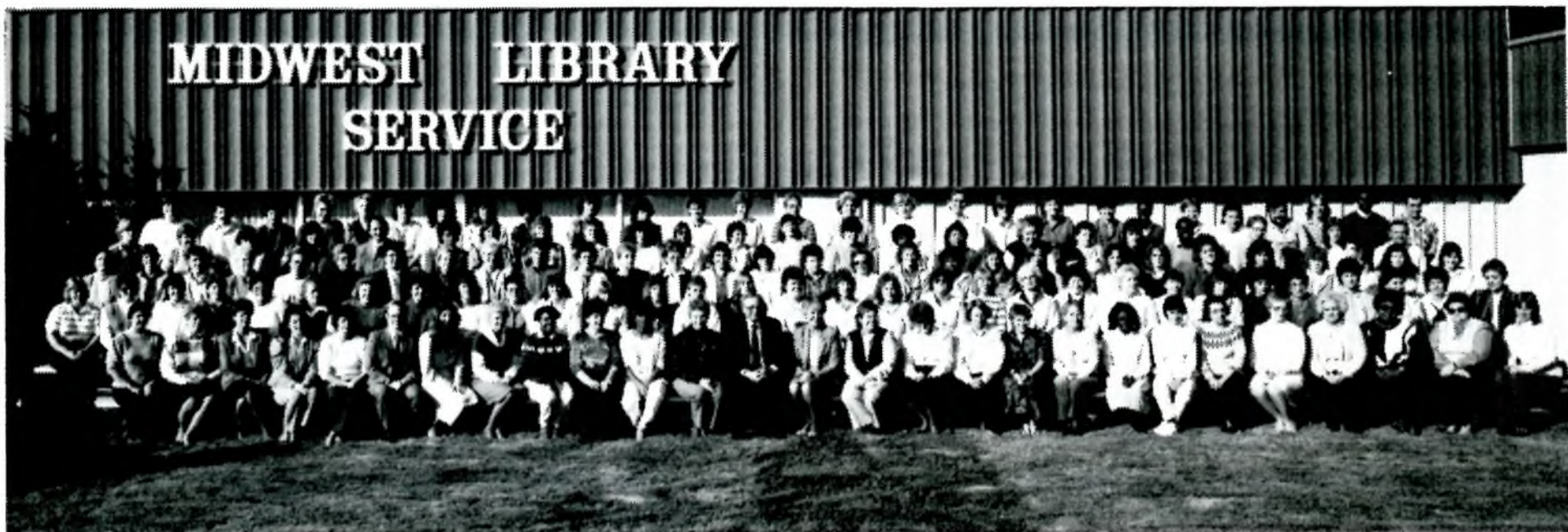
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