

From Dream to Reality A Short History of How a Little Library Was Born and Grew

History and Speech written by Ann Smythe, Past Board Member of the
Red Feather Lakes Community Library, Red Feather Lakes, Colorado

*Read by Ann Smythe in person at the Red Feather Lakes Community Library
Dedication and Grand Reopening on August 27, 2005.*

When the Larimer County Library was in the process of combining with the city library, the county library director encouraged the women to establish a library in Red Feather Lakes. Beginning with some of the excess books from the merger, the library was given to use the basement of the POA Building for the library. As Kathy and Ben Monseeth chose 200 books, a desk and some shelves, and by November 4, the library was open with 18-20 volunteers. These first years the Larimer County Commissioners provided \$240 to cover the cost of utilities. The earliest presidents of the Board were Cathy Carter, Kathy Monseeth, Lynn and Jack Lytle, and Nita Finney.

By 1977 the library was receiving \$2000 from the County General Fund because of generous donations and support of the community. There now were 5000 books crowded on the shelves in this 522 square foot room.

Among the many volunteers, and an original Board member, was Mary Stenzel who often expressed the wish that the library have its own building. After her death, a Mary Stenzel Foundation was established in her memory. Her husband, Ray Stenzel, told the library Board that if the community would help, he would provide aid from Mary's foundation for a new library building. At the time Nita Finney was president of the Board. With her leadership, enthusiasm and inspiration, the community was rallying around and raised money with contributions, spaghetti suppers and fund raising events.

September 5, 1987, ground was broken for the new library building. Much of the labor was provided by volunteers of the area, recruited by Nita Finney.

Ten months later, on July 7, 1988, the Red Feather Community Library opened its doors with a grand celebration and open house.

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This is the Little Library that Could ...

It all began in September of 1969 when women from the Mountain Gals requested the County Library extend the services of the Bookmobile to Red Feather Lakes. But the Bookmobile was unable to negotiate McNey Hill which has a steep grade and was not yet paved. At that time, however, the County Library was in the process of combining with the city library, and the county library director encouraged the women to establish a library in Red Feather Lakes, beginning with some of the excess books made possible by the merger.

Permission was given to use the basement of the POA Building for the library, so Kathy and Bert Morissette chose 200 books, a desk and some shelves, and by November 4, the library was open, with 18-20 volunteers. Those first years the Larimer County Commissioners provided \$240 to offset the cost of utilities. The earliest presidents of the Board were Cathy Carter, Kathy Morissette, Lynn and Jack Lytle, and Nita Raney.

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In 1986 The Friends of the Library was organized, and they became a chief money raising source for the library. Through the years they have

raised many thousands of dollars, primarily with their two annual used book sales. Additional funds have been raised with ice cream socials and pizza parties, and the sale of cook books, t-shirts and tapestry throws depicting the Red Feather area. In addition they have purchased books, a computer, a digital camera and, recently, a printer. Many interesting programs for the community to enjoy have been sponsored by the Friends also.

By 1994 the library was operating on a budget of about \$30,000 a year - money contributed by the county, local citizens, and the Friends. We were the only public library in the state of Colorado that did not employ a library director., and 'tho we wished for a library director, the funds just were not there.

For several years the library had petitioned the County Commissioners for a one year grant, so a part-time library director could be employed. Finally, in 1994, the commissioners agreed with a one year grant of almost \$8000. That was the year we hired Marilyn Colter to work 20 hours a week at little more than a minimum wage.

At the meeting with the commissioners we were represented by Della Frydendall. When asked by one commissioner what we would do for salary when the county's grant ran out, she boldly replied that we would find some "angels". And that is exactly what she , along with Maryanne Lyon and Jean Porter did. They recruited a number of citizens who pledged up to \$1000 a year for five years to assist with a salary for a library director.

That also was the beginning of an endowment plan, because what would we do for salary after the five years were up ? The Stenzel family agreed to match any donations to an endowment fund up to \$10,000. The fund has grown, and each year expendable funds are made available to the library. This year \$ 10,000 went into the building fund.

During the ten years of leadership by Marilyn Colter the library experienced tremendous growth. Beginning in 1996, Marilyn began writing grants to get the computers we needed to offer patrons internet services. In January of 1998 Internet access was introduced in the library, and a year later the circulation system was automated, making it easier to search for information and find materials needed. Today we have five computers for patron usage.

The library's collection of approximately 11,000 items includes latest best sellers and old classics, large print books, non-fiction books, a special collection of Colorado books, reference books, books-on-tape and CDS, videos, periodicals, children's books and a toy lending library. Inter-library

loans for books not in our collection are available. The library also maintains a book drop in Glacier View Meadows for patrons' convenience. And the number of patrons has increased dramatically.

The library always has served as a cultural and educational center for the mountain community, with a wide variety of programming.

Programs for the community presented at the library have included authors James Galvin, Tom Sutherland, Steven Grace; and Wayne and Terry Baltz; also travelogues, programs about high country gardening, edible wild plants with Cattail Bob, tropical birds, pests of the West, astronomy, a cowboy poet, and a modern day Theodore Roosevelt to name some.

From the beginning, a major outreach of the library has been a pre-school story hour begun by Rachele Casselman and JoLynne Johnson. Preschool story hours, filled with stories, games and crafts, continued to be an important program under the leadership of volunteer Maryanne Lyon from 1994 to 2001. They continue today with the help of Karen Deane, Children's Program Director. Summer reading programs are another tradition. This year's program kicked off with a puppet show enjoyed by more than 60 people. And 73 children participated in the program, reading, earning prizes, and proudly wearing t-shirts designed by Karen.

The library cooperates with the Red Feather Lakes School to provide educational and fun programs for children. In 1997 a program provided an opportunity for children to become acquainted with the history of Red Feather Lakes by interviewing some of our older residents, and writing their own booklet, "Red Feather Lakes ; A Child's View of History". The project was complete with a Young Author reception and Book Signing evening. More recently the children enjoyed a project based on a popular series of books about Lemony Snicket. Karen Deane has taught several cartoon drawing classes at the school, She has worked with homeschooling families, too.

While a member of the Library Board, Claudine Murphy began the monthly art and craft exhibits by local artists that soon became popular with the community. That tradition was continued by Ruth Kevan when she was a member of the Board, and now by Karen Deane.

The library also became the meeting place for a watercolor group which continued to meet weekly after a class taught by Ruth Kevan ended. Other classes taught in the library have included quilting and pine needle basket weaving, Internet access, baby sitting and photography for young people. Every month two popular book discussion groups meet to

exchange ideas about books they have read.

Not to be forgotten, are the many, many dedicated volunteers who have worked behind the circulation desk, helped to select new books, catalogued and processed those books, weeded shelves, served on committees and performed other useful tasks. They have been invaluable to the library.

In 1999 the County Commissioners announced that after 2001 they no longer would be able to provide funds for the six libraries in the county. That year, we received \$16,100 , or 45% of our operating funds from the county. If we were to survive, we would need a tax supported library district., an ambitious plan. Bob Kevan volunteered for this challenging task, and led a very successful drive for the Red Feather Mountain Library District. Before the election, Bob spent many,many hours at the County Building and working with committees. planning educational events and publicity. The patrons and library supporters responded with a 2-1 affirmative vote. Now, with tax funds that nearly tripled our former budget library services were expanded even further. Money became available for a full time Library Director, a Children's Program Director, and an Administrative Assistant to handle payroll and data processing. With higher visibility, there was a 73% increase in the number of people who came through the door the first year. Without the library district many of the services your library now provides would not be possible.

By the year 2003, it became evident that the library was outgrowing our building, and a long range planning committree began working on plans for expansion. Two years later because of the wonderful support we have received from this community, and from grants received as a result of Marilyn's diligence, we are here today to open this new addition, which has doubled our square footage and will allow us to continue to expand our services to this great community!

Many of us were disappointed when Marilyn Colter, who did so much to aid the growth and services for this library, resigned from her position as Library Director. But we are very happy to welcome Sarah Myers as our new Director. I know that , with her leadership and because of the spirit and support of this mountain community, the library will continue to endure and prosper in the days ahead.

Because this always has been the Little Library that Could !!!