



## Overview *By Jacqueline B. Scott*

Celebrating Freedom through Knowledge for 50 Years

### From Scattered to Consolidated

Jefferson County Public Library turned 50 years old in 2002. The library system was applauded in a resolution passed by the Jefferson County Board of Commissioners Jan. 9, 2002, for providing “50 years of unfettered access to knowledge for the entire community as a free service.” The library was saluted as an “innovative library system, not only in Colorado, but also in the entire nation.”

That was not always the case. Before a countywide library was created in 1952, small libraries were birthed and nurtured by neighborhoods, clubs and Community Chests, which struggled to keep a few books in circulation. These early libraries served communities evolving from prospectors and settlers to merchants and families in the first half of the 20th century.

The second half of the 1900s benefitted from “political savvy and political courage to increase library funding,” according to 1981-1984 Library Board of Trustees Chairman C.R. “Dick” Spielman. The increased funding jumpstarted library construction and book purchases to keep pace with a burgeoning population and technological breakthroughs.

The conversion from independent, scattered libraries to a countywide taxpayer-supported system began Dec. 29, 1952. By unanimous vote of the Jefferson County Board of Commissioners the Jefferson County Public Library system was launched.

It was hardly a stunning start. The library system’s first budget was meager, just \$10,000, and its collection housed only 35,000 books. Not impressed, some of the independent libraries declined to join.



Over the years, funding, books and facilities improved. One by one independent libraries opted into the system. When in 1969 Edgewater and Arvada came on board, the system finally became countywide—in fact, not just description.

Fifty years after that first investment of \$10,000 by the commissioners, the Jefferson County Public Library has its own tax assessment, separate from the county's. Its operating budget in 2002 was \$18.65 million. The number of books and other materials available in 2001 topped 1 million, and 2 million people checked out items about 3 million times at 11 facilities serving a population of more than 560,000.