

Future as Interesting as Past

Part of being an “envy around the state” was customer satisfaction, one of Knott’s priorities—and his attention to customer service paid off for the library. A 2002 survey recorded a 92 percent customer rating of excellent/good for helpfulness of staff. The same 2002 survey reports that the people of Jefferson County “highly value the library for its importance to quality of life, equality of opportunity for all in the community, and services to children.”

Knott said this level of approval has to be earned—continuously.

For the long term, Knott wants to add three more full-service libraries to the existing seven (Arvada, Belmar, Columbine, Evergreen, Golden, Lakewood and Standley Lake). New libraries are planned in the northwest portion of the county and at Fehringer Ranch in the southwest. Additionally, the Arvada Library is slated for expansion and relocation.

Technology also helped boost customer service and satisfaction. Although, by 2002, electronic books had not become mainstays in people’s lives, as often had been predicted, online services at the library had found a growing niche.

The technology guru for the library is 15-year senior manager John Zacrep, director of information technology. He is proud of the advances at the library.

We are probably the most technologically rich library in this state, and many other states for that matter. We offer our customers more resources than any other system in Colorado. Most other libraries in the state do not offer online access from home. We do. We also were the first public library to join in consortiums to expand resources.

We belong to the Prospector Consortium of academic libraries, and we formed and manage a consortium named PLUS, which consists of Jefferson County, Aurora, Arapahoe, Boulder, Broomfield and Louisville libraries.



Timeline continued

1989

• New 30,000-square-foot Columbine Library opens on Bowles Avenue in Littleton.

1991

• New Standley Lake Library opens at 8485 Kipling St.

1993

• The Evergreen Library opens in its current location at 5000 Highway 73.

1995

• Jefferson County Public Library becomes the first public library to request that Innovative Interfaces, Inc., a major library software system, build a system that would support a shared collection.

1996

• Golden Library moves to its current location, a newly renovated building on 10th Street.

1996

• Conifer Library opens in Conifer High School.

In the future, I see more and more patron-initiated services, such as patrons getting online to update their own addresses and phone numbers. They already can renew books and put books on hold—all from the comfort of their homes while sitting in their jammies. Still in the pilot stage is the library's online e-mail reference services.

Zacrep recalls when he first came to Jefferson County Public Library in 1987.

There were no computers. The main-frame for book cataloging was the size of a large room. It was very advanced at the time, but it also was very slow. The first computers were the original Apples and Apple IIs. In 1988 the library purchased its first PCs, six Compaq computers that weren't even 286s.

Since that time we have grown and we are running and servicing 458 active computers. All those computers hook up to the Internet and make access for the patrons easy. Under this system we have also created a very comprehensive Online Library. The library system subscribes to a number of electronic databases, such as Ebsco, a database of magazines and journals. There are about 30 different big databases—everything from newspapers and stock quotes to medical information—all offered to Jefferson County library cardholders for free—accessible from home, work or the library.

The Online Library allows people to access resources 24 hours a day, seven days a week. There are 60,000 offsite sessions per month. The Online Library is located at <http://jefferson.lib.co.us>.

Zacrep credits Knott's leadership skills for the continued improvements at the county library over the past three decades.

I think Bill has kept this system in a growth mode by always having a vision. The greatest thing Bill Knott has done over the years is hire the right people and get out of their way. If we get off track, he is there to correct our course. But we always move forward. We have a great deal of respect for Bill.

Grissom described Knott as “multi-talented and well-respected by peers in his field.”

Bill, I guess, would be considered as one of the quiet giants. He hires good people and expects them to do their jobs. He deals with tasks as they cross his desk. He does not accumulate tasks. His organizational skills are renowned. His knowledge of library systems is without question. He’s a professional’s professional.

I know he has had other job offers—great offers. The industry knows his worth. But Bill realized Jefferson County was a good place to raise his children. He is here for the long haul.

Grissom said professionals around the nation recognize Jefferson County Library as a system worth emulating, saying:



Computers are key resource tools for the public in all Jefferson County library facilities.

Timeline continued

1997

- JCPL Retirees group forms, and retired staff members begin to meet regularly.

1999

- Jefferson County Public Library is a leader in creating the Colorado PLUS and Prospector interlibrary loan systems, as well as the Colorado shared library card project, allowing Jefferson County library patrons to use their cards at any Colorado library.

2000

- New Belmar Library opens in the Lakewood City Commons at Wadsworth and Alameda; replaces Villa Library.

How good is the Jefferson County library system? It is evident when you go to national conventions and people seek you out for advice. That's how good this system is. It says you must be doing something right. I also realized how good it is when I sat in meetings at national conventions, heard the latest and realized we already were doing it!

Praise for Knott's service in Jefferson County poured in from colleagues around the state and nation for his 30th anniversary. One such salute came from Donna Morris, president of Colorado Association of Libraries, who wrote:

I am pleased to have watched you provide solid leadership with a human touch to Jefferson County Public Library, Colorado libraries, and as far back as when we were both Kansas librarians...

Bill, your leadership and expertise in designing and building new public libraries is definitely superior. All who enter any of the libraries you designed are privileged to use some of the best-designed public libraries.

Knott, now ending his 31st year of service, still has his eyes on the future. He recognizes it is not merely technology that is changing in the 21st century. Jefferson County itself is changing, and that change will impact the library.



Jefferson County Public Library is constantly getting ready for the new generation of readers.

Knott described the “graying” of the county in an interview in July 2002.

This county is nearly built out. 2020, it's done. The fast-paced growth will be over. The county is getting older, more stable. The rest of the metropolitan area may grow rapidly, especially counties like Douglas and Arapahoe. But Jefferson County won't. It can't.

Timeline continued

2001

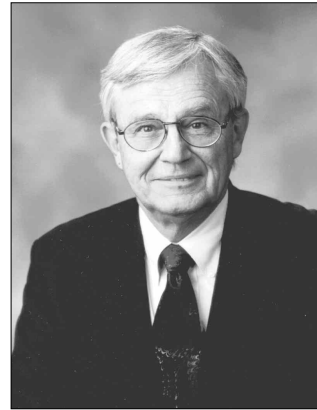
• Jefferson County Public Library has grown to include seven full-service facilities and four smaller community libraries in key locations across 780 square miles, and a Bookmobile. The library is also now one of the 25 most technologically progressive library systems in the nation.

2002

• The library's annual budget now exceeds \$20 million. Its shared collection tops the one million mark in materials available for patrons; and its nearly 200 full-time staff members serve a population of more than 560,000 residents.

• Jefferson County's Online Library tops the one-million mark in 12-month usage by patrons, both in the library and off-site.

• January 12, 2002 - Special ceremony marks the beginning of our library's 50th anniversary.



County Librarian
William A. Knott

We expect to see more expensive homes. We are looking at the county being upscale and older. Therefore, the demand for print will not diminish and the library will continue to invest heavily in books. Also, we realize the community places great value on libraries as places, whether it be for people who read murder mysteries or who come looking for their daily Wall Street Journal.

Granted, we have not wanted a large, centralized administration, preferring strong libraries located in their communities. But some day we may want to centralize our online, digital and electronic services. We have to constantly re-evaluate our plans so that they are in step with the future.

So it has been. Pioneer settlers gathered precious books, shared them and called them libraries. Early communities held tea parties and begged donations to keep well-worn volumes available in humble accommodations and called them libraries. A county taxed itself and built fine buildings to house an expansive collection and called it Jefferson County Public Library. That library today looks to a future of online services for businesses and families, computer access to all, and easily accessible community libraries. The benefits are many: the community's collective knowledge grows, socio-economic gaps lessen, businesses thrive, families are strengthened and individuals are empowered.

Celebrating Freedom through Knowledge for 50 Years