

Public librarian shortage threatens service

Technology, image cited as reasons

By Susan Buck
Staff writer

Technology, low pay and a decline in the popularity of public service jobs are creating a shortage of public librarians, experts say.

In the past five years, fewer and fewer people are applying for positions at public libraries, especially in children's librarian positions and those positions that require extensive technical knowledge.

As computer databases, cassettes and compact discs join newspapers, magazines and books, the United States is confronting a shortage of public librarians to help sort through the glut of information.

In Livonia, Farmington Hills, Plymouth, Canton and Redford, library heads say they have not had to reduce services, but fewer qualified applicants limits the choice.

"Eight years ago when I first came here, there were as many as 200 applicants for a full-time reference librarian," said Rebecca Havenstein-Coughlin, assistant director of the Canton Public Library. "I interviewed for days. Last year, we received 15 applications for a full-time children's librarian position, which is a similar professional position."

THE CANTON Library has seven full-time and 10 part-time librarian positions, Havenstein-Coughlin said.

Canton's young families create many demands for library resources. "If we should have even one librarian leave, we would have diffi-



FILE PHOTO

Farmington Community Library's Farmington branch includes a downstairs children's reading room staffed with children's librarians.

culties filling the position," she said.

Plans for the opening of a new Livonia Public Library in June places that city in an enviable position especially when compared to Westland, which has no public libraries within its city limits. The Wayne-Westland Library operates from a location in Wayne.

Westland, with a population of 85,000, is the only city among Michigan's 15 largest cities that does not have its own public library.

The Livonia Public Library will hire eight to 15 librarians for its new library. Among these positions, there will be two full-time and two part-time children's librarian positions.

"I would expect that we will have relatively few people applying for

the children's librarian positions," said Michael Deller, director.

Livonia has three other branch libraries.

In the past, children's librarians were paid about 20 percent less than their counterparts in some areas, Deller said.

Historically, librarianship was considered one of the few acceptable positions that women could hold.

"People felt that a children's librarian position was a dead-end position with no opportunity for advancement. The problem isn't finding children's librarians. The problem is finding children's librarians of the quality we want to work with," Deller said.

THE REDFORD Public Library and the Wayne-Westland Public Library are part of the Wayne County

Public Library, which has 15 member libraries. The Wayne County Human Resources Department is responsible for hiring, according to Barbara Gray, assistant director of the Wayne-Oakland Library Federation who administers the Wayne County Library.

The Redford Public Library has been without a young adult librarian since September when that person was promoted to head librarian for the Lincoln Park Public Library, said Marjorie Hoag.

Hiring is expected soon from the three applicants who applied for the position, said Gray.

In the meantime, Hoag and a children's librarian have taken over responsibilities.

No vacancies exist in the Wayne-Westland Library, according to Gray.

In Plymouth, a part-time children's librarian position has been unfilled since Jan. 1, according to Pat Thomas, director of the Dunning-Hough Library. The person who previously held the position took a job in a public school library, she said.

"Of seven applicants, only two had the background and experience that we were looking for, and they have already found other positions. I plan to repost the position," Thomas said.

According to the American Library Association, national average salaries in 1986 for those with master's degrees in library science were \$20,874 as an average starting salary, \$25,552 for reference workers, \$25,390 for school librarians and \$23,943 for corporate and other special librarians.

IN MICHIGAN, the closing of the

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— Pat Thomas
Plymouth librarian

library science department at Western Michigan University less than a decade ago left the state with only two universities that offered library science studies: the University of Michigan and Wayne State University.

And the word is getting out at the U-M that a librarian shortage exists, according to Mary Cary, director of student admission in the Information and Library Studies Department.

In fall 1987 the university registered 301 students seeking a master's degree in information and library studies — the highest ever at the University, she said. In 1984 only 172 students were enrolled in the program.

And library directors are going the extra mile to find the person most qualified for the job.

In 1986, for example, Farmington Community Library director Beverly Papal posted a head of children's services position for the Farmington branch in national library journals. Also, two people were hired for children's positions at the Farmington Hills branch, as a result of an American Library Association Conference in North Carolina, she said.

Diabetes Day alerts all to disease's effects

March 15 is National Diabetes Alert Day, a time when the public should be reminded of the severe effects diabetes can have if not properly monitored.

Diabetes is a disease in which a person has a problem using sugar, the main source of energy.

The problem occurs because insulin, a hormone normally produced by the pancreas gland, either is not produced in enough quantity, is not released into the blood at the right time, or is ineffective in producing its effect.

Insulin's job is to get a diabetic's body to use sugar efficiently — like the carburetor of a car helps the engine use fuel efficiently.

Over time diabetes may begin to develop certain problems, especially with the small blood vessels in their kidneys, legs, feet and eyes. Such

problems are the result of the disease weakening the walls of the small blood vessels and causing fluid and other substances in the blood to leak out in much larger amounts than normal.

When this process occurs in the eyes, a person develops what is known as diabetic retinopathy. Left untreated, the disease can severely impair vision or lead to blindness.

"The effects of diabetes on the eyes are treatable," said retina specialist Dr. Mark Haimann of Retina Consultants of Michigan, Southfield.

"When detected early, diabetic eye disease can be treated and loss of sight can be prevented. Unfortunately, when the disease is in its most treatable stages, it is not accompanied by symptoms and, therefore, diabetics do not feel they need regular eye exams. In reality, the exact opposite is true."

According to results from the Michigan Department of Public Health's 1986 Diabetic Retinopathy Survey, most diabetics do not visit an ophthalmologist or retina specialist annually.

"They are placing themselves in great danger. We know that almost 50 percent of all diabetics with the disease for 10 years have a chance of developing diabetic eye disease. Our best chance to fight blindness is detecting the cause of the disease in its earliest, most treatable stages," Haimann said.

For additional information on diabetic eye disease, call your local chapter of the American Diabetes Association or call or write Retina Consultants of Michigan for a free informational pamphlet, 29201 Telegraph, Suite 100, Southfield 48034.

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