

Library employees seek wage hike

By Joanne Maliszewski
staff writer

After his requests for additional personnel were turned down for two consecutive years, Farmington Community Library Director Gordon Lewis has given up.

"Once you've been turned down twice, you forget it," Lewis said. Although additional library staff would be helpful with the anticipated increases in library use and circulation in the coming fiscal year, Lewis said he will continue with a "thinly spread" 37.5 employees.

Instead, Lewis would like to see his

employees' salaries and benefits raised to a level that's more comparable to library employees in other community library systems.

Benefits and salaries for the library employees, Lewis said, have remained fairly static, taking up approximately 54-57 percent of the library's total \$1.1-million budget. In other Oakland County library systems, about 70 percent of the budget is devoted to employee salaries and budget, he added.

In a 1981 survey, Lewis said, Farmington placed second out of 10 library systems in the Wayne-Oakland Library Federation with 18,600 books in circulation per staff member, Lewis said.

That's compared to Southfield's 13,000 books in circulation per staff member. "Our staff is spread pretty thin."

LEWIS is requesting that Farmington and Farmington Hills — the library's two major funding sources — provide money to give the library employees a 2.2-percent merit raise and another 3.5-percent increase to adjust their salaries so they are comparable with other nearby library systems.

The requested raises reflect about an additional \$33,000 in the library's 1983-84 preliminary budget. That total, however, excludes increased costs of hospitalization, Social Security and other

employee expenses, Lewis added.

"For some positions, staff must work at the Farmington Library for three years before they are paid the starting salary at nearby libraries," Lewis said. Farmington's library wages have remained fairly static because library officials traditionally have put financial emphasis on money needed to buy new books and other library materials, Lewis said.

Although it would seem the Farmington library might lose employees because of the lower than average salaries and benefits, Lewis said, the tight job market is forcing them to stay on.

Library board feels financial pinch

Continued from Page 1

would be set aside for children, young adults and for those with reading handicaps.

When these numbers are compared to the annual circulation of over one-half million, the library is acquiring materials to meet current demand at a rate of less than one-tenth of a percent of circulation," Lewis said. "This rate of acquisition is far less than is required to meet the demands much less expend funds for important acquisitions.

LEWIS' FRUSTRATION comes from statistics showing that while Farmington libraries offer approximately 146,000 books, "about 50-percent are not available because they are in circulation."

Even with Oakland County's largest

library circulation, "we're a very, very small library," Lewis said. That's particularly true when out of the 10 largest libraries, Farmington is ranked seventh in per capita financial support with approximately \$12 per person going to the library, he said.

Desperate for financial changes, Lewis said money and the cities' past refusal to allow the library board to reorganize as an independent authority is the core of the problem.

"The library used to get more in millage," Lewis said.

Although the cities appropriate a lump-dollar sum to the library system, Lewis said, transposing those amounts into mills would show that eight years ago the system received about 1 1/4 mills in revenue. That changed about eight years ago, dropping to about 1.10

mills and now it's down to .9 mill, he said.

"The rate of millage the library has received has shrunk," Lewis said, adding that under those circumstances it's difficult to keep up with mounting costs and circulation.

That's why library board members want an independent library authority capable of levying operating millage, Lewis said.

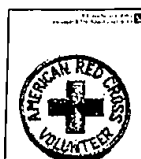
If reorganized as an authority levying one mill, Lewis said, the library system would have an additional \$30,000 with which to work.

But both city councils recently received a less-than-encouraging report issued by Farmington Hills attorney Paul Bibeau evaluating whether the requested library reorganization offered the cities or library any advantages.

A SIMILAR LIBRARY reorganization question was defeated in 1978 when library board members first requested the change, said Farmington City Manager Robert Deadman. While Farmington voters approved the request, Farmington Hills voters opposed it so the issue was put on hold, he said.

"The issue was sent to the attorney (Bibeau) because we didn't see what the real advantage (in an authority) was," said Farmington Mayor Alton Bennett.

After reviewing state library organization laws, Bibeau indicated in his report that the idea of forming an authority "would provide anything other than an opportunity for the Board of Trustees to place millage questions before the electorate of the communities," Deadman said.



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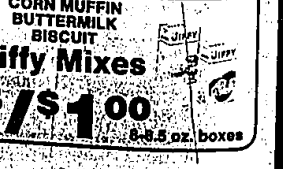
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