

VIEWPOINTS

Editorial - Fast food buffets 1, libraries 0

If only Saskatchewan's libraries had space to accommodate a KFC buffet.

Or maybe it's just to KFC's good fortune that it doesn't also operate a book lending division.

Either way, the mere rumour that Weyburn's main tourist attraction might be shuttered by head office as part of a company-wide remodelling was enough for Premier Brad Wall and health minister Dustin Duncan to spring into action last May.

KFC ultimately bowed to public pressure and Saskatchewan's unfettered face-stuffing lived to see another day.

How nice it would be to see them show the same commitment to an institution that actually promotes happy, healthy and productive lifestyles.

To those manning the ivory tower in Regina, the 58 per cent funding cut to the regional library system in last month's provincial budget probably seemed like a harmless reduction that would barely be noticed by the bumpkins and rubes out in the sticks.

What they got instead was The Little Budget Cut That Could, mobilizing a vast cross-section of the population that not only seems inclined to fight like hell to save their libraries, but are also research-savvy enough to arm themselves with those inconvenient pieces of information called facts.

Here are a few more.

In real dollars, the \$3.5 million cut to the

regional library system is equivalent to one forty-second of one per cent of the total provincial budget and roughly one quarter of one per cent of the provincial deficit from 2016-17.

To redirect the remaining dollars into maintaining full operations at 42 per cent of Southeast Regional Library's branches would require the closure of 27 branches.

And to follow the Alberta model (one library per 15,000 people) that education minister Don Morgan pointed to in defence of the budget cut would require the closure of 15 more.

(Southeast Regional Library's service area being roughly equivalent to the boundaries of the federal Souris-Moose Mountain riding, and fairly assuming that only the largest communities would be spared, only branches in Estevan, Weyburn, Indian Head, White City and Moosomin would remain to serve a giant square that includes everything south and east of Regina to the Manitoba and Montana borders.)

This isn't about the green ties versus the orange ties, or left versus right.

This is about maintaining safe places for your kids to socialize, learn and create; in many cases (Sedley comes to mind) the library is home to the only regular children's activities of any kind, outside of sports.

This is about ensuring as many people as possible, not just the privileged, have reliable access to news, music, movies and employment, thanks

to the wonders of computers, printers and the Internet.

This is about keeping the province's mental health costs down (until those too are no longer funded), as those who read for pleasure are at risk of losing an invaluable outlet for managing stress.

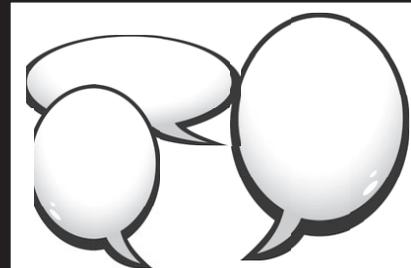
This is about calling attention to Morgan's misleading statistics that fail to acknowledge the role that the 2010 launch of a province-wide lending system, which his own party helped fund, has had in the recent drop in total library cards held. (Where 10 years ago you may have held three or four active cards, today you need one.)

And maybe most importantly this is about promoting and encouraging the comprehension and retention of information, something that would be negatively impacted by any shift toward e-books (#science) as Morgan has encouraged libraries to do. (Is this a bad time to also point out that Medicine Hat Public Library spent more per e-book title in 2016 than it did per print title?)

Literacy is not a sexy word, but understand that without it you are neither going to work nor running your own business today. You're not signing the contract for your new snowmobile, filling out a hunting license, or booking a vacation online either.

Hell, you wouldn't even be able to order chicken off a menu.

On second thought, maybe we will need that buffet after all.



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Vevang - Libraries remain magical places



Glennys Vevang

Today I'd like to tell you a story.

It may not end happily ever after, and probably won't become a Pixar movie, but it is a story that needs to be told.

Once upon a time, many years ago, in a municipality far, far

away, there lived townspeople and farmers. They were a community of people who didn't mind that they had to raise their families, tend their crops, and make their meals from scratch, without electronic devices. Many days, they were too tired from their day's work to even watch their black and white TV's.

What free time they had, they gave back to their community, building a better place for their friends and families. They built arenas and swimming pools and ball diamonds. They did

not move to neighboring cities with better services, or fancier homes. They stayed - and did the hard work of raising a town.

Then one fine spring day, a wonderful thing happened! The people of the town opened a library. No longer would their children have to read their meager school collection, tattered and dog-eared. From the littlest citizen to the oldest, this would be a place for all to enjoy.

As time went by, the children of the land began to see the value of the gift they had been given.

They learned there was magic in a place where the world comes to you. They could travel anywhere. It didn't matter if you were rich or poor, the door opened equally. They used their gift well, and passed its value on to their children. They helped with programs, and contests and special events, taking care, always, to become what the community needed it to be.

It's been a long time since that April morning of 1972. Many things have changed. The children of the land are grown, and the builders

of the magic place, are old, or gone.

But the children of long ago know, magic still resides in that "brick and mortar" space. They believe in the right to learn in their community with access for everyone, especially the elderly and its youngest members. They know the restorative power of local gathering spaces, and they know the value of austerity. They learned it from the builders - who taught them long ago, the value of community riches, over private riches.

In a fairytale, there

is always a threat - an emperor or an evil wizard who exploits the kingdom for their own gain. In those stories, it is always the peasants who wear the pinchy shoes, living in a land of disparity, where the rich receive, and the humble, do not. But sometimes a hero comes along.

I think that's us. Let's re-write this story. Let's be the collective voice that speaks for our builders, our communities and our Magic Places.

Grab your cape. It's go time.

The Forum

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