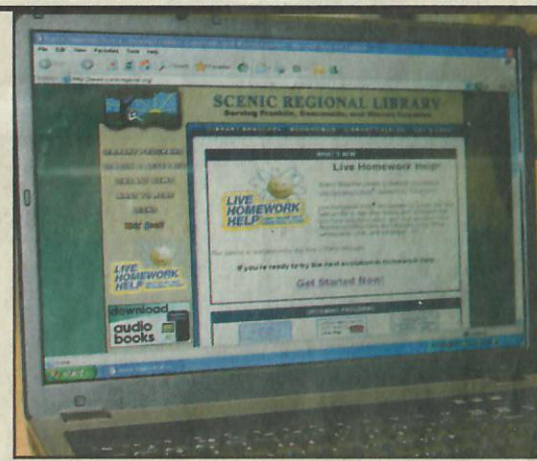# A Community Resource

Scenic Regional Library Marks 50th Anniversary

By Karen Cernich,
Missourian Features Editor

As proud as Director Ken Rohrbach is of the Scenic Regional Library system, even he is sometimes amazed by the efficiency and speed with which it can serve patrons.

"I field the reserves at the library," he said, "and I have seen times where someone in St. Clair, for example, requests a book from the Union branch at midnight, the book was pulled from the Union shelf at 7 a.m. and delivered to the St. Clair branch by 9 a.m.

"It doesn't always happen that fast, but some days it has."

That kind of quick service is been made possible only by the Internet, said Rohrbach.

Back in 1959, when the Scenic Regional Library system was established, patrons would have to physically go to the library to look up a certain title in the card catalog or at the very least communicate with a librarian by phone during work hours.

Not surprisingly, Rohrbach said over the last 50 years, computers and the Internet have had the biggest impact on the way the Scenic operates and serves patrons.

Scenic Regional Library Director Ken Rohrbach and Assistant Director Vivienne Beckett pose amongst the books of the Union branch, headquarters for the three-county library system. Missourian Photo.

"Technology has helped to level the information playing field for people in less urban areas," he said.

"The automation of the circulation/catalog system has really enabled increased resource sharing. The initial automation system was implemented in 1994, but conversion to the second generation system in 2004 dramatically improved accessibility.

"Today the card catalog is online and accessible over the Internet," said Rohrbach. "Individuals may browse the catalog to see if books. There will be tours of the bookmobile, giveaways, historical exhibits, stories, face painting, kettle korn and music by the Local Gents bluegrass band.

Authors attending will include:

Chris Stuckenschneider, "Twist of Fate";
Steve Gerdel, "Oak Mountain";

Don Melsha, "A Walking Tour of the Early Homes and Businesses of Hermann";

Steve Murrie, "Planet Earth: Guide to the Planet" and "Every Minute on Earth: Fun

The Scenic Regional Library bookmobile visits a community in April 1961. Below, patrons young and old make their selections.

Facts That Happen Every 60 Seconds";

Dan Terry, "Missouri Shadows" and

Historical society representatives from Franklin, Gasconade and Warren counties.

City Libraries

Before Scenic Regional Library was organized in 1959 or the county library districts just before that, communities had their own town libraries. In Union, for example, the P.E.O. chapter had started a library back in 1935. It was not tax supported, though, and had to rely on donations, fines and book rentals for funds.

The first year it received $464.80. It purchased 188 books at a cost of $258 and received 525 donations.

In St. Clair, the Evergreen Garden Club sponsored a library that opened in January 1952 in the Earney-Junge building on South Main in the center of town. The library had 700 books, including two Bibles. Hours were 1 to 5 p.m. on Tuesdays and Thursdays and 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. on Saturdays.

Three club members served as librarians.

The Pacific Library was organized in January 1938 through the Twentieth Century Club in a small building on St. Louis Street that had previously been a barbershop. The W.P.A. provided a temporary librarian, and club members filled in when necessary.

The library didn't have a reliable source of income until a library association was formed in November 1941. With 200 members and yearly dues of $1, the library had a working capital of $192.96.

The New Haven library was started in

books are available, and if they have a Scenic Regional Library card, may renew books, request books, even post comments.

"Circulation also is automated," Rohrbach noted. "Now when a book is placed on request, it immediately is shown as on request throughout the system. When a book is checked out/in, it immediately shows in the system, and books and other materials may be returned at any location and are shown as checked in."

Scenic Regional Library, which serves Franklin, Gasconade and Warren counties with branches in Union, St. Clair, New Haven, Hermann, Owensville and Warrenton, is celebrating its 50th anniversary this year and will mark the milestone with a special celebration Saturday, June 6, from 4 to 7 p.m. at the Union location.

Local authors will be on hand to sign

April 1937. It was not tax supported and relied on donations and fundraising.

The Owensville library was established in 1954, the Hermann library in 1948 and Warrenton library in 1940.

Communities Come Together

It was in the mid-1950s when a group of citizens approached the Missouri State Library board about setting up a county-wide library service that would include a bookmobile service.

A "demonstration," including bookmobile service, was set up in June 1957 with headquarters for the three-county demonstration operating out of the Union library.

The Franklin County Library District was approved by election May 6, 1958. A vote of 3 to 1 established the district and approved the 1 mill tax (10 cents per each $100 assessed valuation).

Only those communities that were not already served by a tax-supported library voted, meaning Washington, Pacific and Sullivan did not vote. Pacific libary, however, voted to merge with the county district in March 1959 and it became official that December.

Demonstrations also were operating in Gasconade and Warren counties. In April 1959 they each conducted similar elections to the one in Franklin County. Both were favorable and the Gasconade County Library District and the Warren County Library District were formed.

The following month, the three county library boards signed a contract to jointly provide service under the corporate name Scenic Regional Library.

Members of these boards were:

Franklin County — O. E. Burke, president, Marshall Jackson, vice president, Mrs. Edwin Bebermeyer, secretary-treasurer, Mrs. Frank W. Jenny and William (Woody) Eckelkamp.

Gasconade County — J. E. Murray,

Former Scenic Regional Library director Sallie Hancox, at an earlier time, updates the library's old card catalog system. Submitted Photos.

president, G. Dewey Richardson, vice president, Mrs. William Harrison, secretary-treasurer, Arnold Schmidt and the Rev. L. V. Brown.

Warren County — Mrs. S. W. Joost, president, Urban Ruether, secretary-treasurer, Alfred Grannemann, Mrs. Edward Hagelman and Miss Edna Polster.

Start With 15,000 Books

Lucy Lomax, a librarian with the Missouri State Library who had conducted the countywide library demonstration in Franklin County, resigned her position and become Franklin County librarian, effective Jan. 1, 1959.

Other early staff included Karl Schink (grandfather-in-law of Scenic's current children's librarian Christy Schink) served as bookmobile driver, Mrs. Eleanore Lewis

Children's story time, shown here from decades past, has long been a favorite program at Scenic Regional Library.

Scenic Regional

as bookmobile clerk, Mrs. Jeanette Schroeder as secretary, Miss Meta Ann Vitt as bookkeeper and Mrs. Opal Schellhardt.

Librarians of the New Haven, Pacific, St. Clair and Union libraries also were placed on the county library payroll.

The new bookmobile was delivered in June 1959 and made its first run June 11. During the first summer of operation 16 mm talking films were shown at most stops.

Materials available from the bookmobile in addition to books were phonograph records, Viewmaster reels and pamphlets. Filmstrips and films were available then, as now, by arrangement with the library office in Union.

Scenic Regional Library started with a bookstock of 15,000 books left by the Missouri State Library and the books in the various city libraries. During the first year of operation 8,926 books were added.

By the end of 1964 the book stock had reached 70,126 and most of the old books owned by the city libraries had been classified and cataloged or discarded to make room for new books. Up-to-date reference collections had also been added.

Modern Services

Union remains the headquarters for the Scenic Regional Library system. Today the population served by Scenic Regional is 116,117 — which breaks down as follows:

Franklin County, 76,250; Gasconade County, 15,342; and Warren County, 24,525.

Back in 1959, the regional circulation was 142,566 based on a book collection of 47,185. Last year, circulation was 535,317 based on a collection of 248,536 books.

Today Scenic Regional libraries not only provide books, said Rohrbach, but a variety of media, as well as online databases, downloadable audio books (over 2,000 to choose from), even online tutoring.

"The downloadable books are neat because you can download them from home onto your home computer," said Rohrbach. "They will stay accessible on your home computer for two weeks, but if you move them onto an iPod or MP3 player, they are there until you delete them.

"From a librarian's standpoint, it's interesting to watch the progression of media — tapes to CDs, which weren't always great because they could get scratched — to these downloadable books, which can never get lost or damaged and don't take up any floor space."

Scenic Regional Library offers patrons access to more than 30 databases, including Live Homework Help, a free real-time tutoring resource for students in kindergarten through 12th grade.

"We were the first library in the St. Louis area and the second in the entire state to offer this service, and since adding it in November, we have had over 350 users," said Vivienne Beckett, Scenic's assistant director. "It's available (on the Internet) from 2 p.m. to midnight with your Scenic library card."

Other popular databases are Read the Books and those pertaining to genealogy. The newest database is Learning Express Library, which provides up-to-date study guides and practice exams for many of the major tests, including the ACT, SAT and GED. It also includes civil service tests, such as the Postal Worker's Exam and the Police Officer's Exam, as well as the military ASVAB. In addition, there are modules that instruct patrons in building a resume and searching for a job.

Scenic's many databases are a popular resource for patrons, said Rohrbach.

"People did over 143,000 searches on our databases just last year," he noted.

Looking ahead, Rohrbach noted one of the next big additions at Scenic will be expanding services to include the Washington Public Library. The expansion is expected to be finalized late this summer.

When it is, Washington library card holders will be able to use their Washington library cards at Scenic library branches, to request books from Scenic's catalog and to access information and services on the Scenic Web site, and vice versa for Scenic library card holders.

Currently, Washington library is waiting on a grant that will cover the expense of changing its software and systems to match Scenic's.

Nell Redhage, director of the Washington library, said the staff is "very much looking forward" to the cooperative agreement between the neighboring library systems.

"It's very exciting," she remarked. "We're eager to see it happen."

For more information on Scenic Regional Library or to access information online, people should visit www.scenicregional.org.