TRIBUTE TO DICK ENGEN
compiled by Nancy Lesh

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REMEMBERING DICK ENGEN

Richard B. “Dick” Engen, Alaska State Librarian from 1967 to 1986, passed away July 15, 2011. A page of the July-Sept. 2011 Newspoke carried an obituary. In this issue, I’ve had the honor and privilege of gathering tributes to him from a few of his colleagues and friends which tell a fuller story of the man. If you had the opportunity to work with Dick during his tenure, I know you will treasure the memories. If you are newer to Alaska libraries than 1986, I hope you will enjoy reading about Dick and learning more about the foundation he built for our libraries today. Alaska libraries and AkLA are stronger because of his vision and work. If anyone else has stories or thoughts about Dick that you would like to share, please send them in to Newspoke for the next issue.

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LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT

Mike Robinson

For the past several weeks the snow has been creeping down the mountains around Anchorage and today it finally snowed in town. As I navigated the city traffic to go for the first ski of the season, my thoughts turned once again to the ever changing seasons. When I first moved to Alaska from Florida, where I was born and raised, the rhythm of the seasons was what I noticed most. That was 17 years ago when I came up to take a job as one of two librarians at the Anchorage Daily News.

The other librarian, Sharon Palmisano, hired me after a telephone interview despite my trepidation about moving to Alaska, a place I had never visited and was not particularly trying to get to; I just wanted out of Florida and the job sounded good. I was reassured that “sure it’s cold but it’s dark too.” I will always be grateful to Sharon for taking a chance on a rookie librarian.

When I started working with Sharon, one of her expectations was that I participate in AkLA, so I attended the local chapter and was vice-president one year. I think the expectation that you participate in AkLA was fairly common among librarians “back in the day.” This was the generation that helped build libraries in Alaska during the expansion of infrastructure and services during the 70s and 80s. They knew that if they did not pitch in together, it would not get done.

Nowadays I think there is a bit of a disconnect with that pioneering spirit. AkLA is either taken for granted (i.e., someone else is handling that) or considered irrelevant (what’s that got to do with my job/library?). And despite my good start when I first arrived in Alaska, I have been guilty of that same attitude. I paid my annual dues and attended conference every couple of years, but really was not involved until recently. And I bet there are a lot of us in a similar situation.

I see two major challenges facing AkLA in the years to come: making sure the organization is relevant to the membership and getting the next generation involved in running the show. So how do we accomplish that? One way is through better communication. AkLA is involved in a lot of activities and initiatives but unless you are on

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(President’s Letter - Cont. from pg. 2)

Executive council or thoroughly scour the website you probably do not know about them. In the coming months we will be working on changes to the AkLA website to make it more informative, interactive, and social so that members can easily find out what’s going on and let us know what they think. Another way is an “occupy AkLA” movement which is not an accurate metaphor but it sounds cool. We need the majority to get involved—run for office, participate in a committee or roundtable, or start an initiative. So if you are an old hand, encourage someone else to get involved. And if you have not been involved before, step up to the plate. After all, it’s your organization!

Nancy Lesh
AkLA Historian
Sometimes a relatively benign event ends up with unexpected, serendipitous consequences. That was the case, I think, in 1967 when Richard B. Engen became Alaska State Librarian. When he interviewed for the position, he said he was impressed with the unusual level of cooperation among the public, academic, school, special libraries, the Alaska Library Association, and the State Library. It didn’t take long for us to realize that he not only supported this cooperative spirit but he led us into new areas of cooperation that he had envisioned from his fresh point of view. It became an era when libraries and librarians often overstepped traditional boundaries so that libraries with legitimate needs but lacking necessary resources were helped by those that had access to resources but perhaps not the responsibility. Dick was often the facilitator in his state-wide role.

Dick’s enthusiasm, his outgoing personality, his openness, sense of fairness, and honesty were immediately recognized by the legislators with whom he had to work. They trusted him, and his influence with legislators worked to the advantage of every library in the State sooner or later.

My years with the University of Alaska fortuitously brought me into close contact with Dick on a personal as well as a professional basis. Without even trying, he earned the respect and affection of the many, many people with whom he worked and socialized, here in Alaska, in the other states, and in many places throughout the world, especially in the polar regions. His accomplishments—far too numerous and encompassing to enumerate here—will remind us constantly of the many ways he has touched our lives.

Though we grieve his passing, we celebrate the good memories he leaves with us.

Karen Crane, Alaska State Librarian, Retired
George Smith, Acting Director, Alaska State Library, Retired

Dick had a booming and unforgettable personality. The first few years after becoming State Librarian, whenever I met someone and was asked about my job, the immediate response was “Oh, Dick Engen.” Also as I met librarians, board members, and others around the state I was often told, “Dick said we could get a grant for...” It was not unusual for a total stranger to walk into the library and say “We are ready for the grant now.”

At one point George Smith asked whether, if he told me that Dick had promised to send his daughter to college, would I believe it? I said if it was library
school, I might. Dick had contacts all around the state, and George and I tried to meet as many expectations as possible.

Dick’s greatest achievement was the very strong expectation of cooperation among libraries that still exists today. That cooperation among all types of libraries is exceedingly rare in other states. In many other states the working relationship between libraries and the state library is not as strong as it is here. The positive relationships Dick built still serve us today. Another tremendous achievement was encouraging AkLA to fund a lobbyist. That investment has paid off in many ways. In addition, librarians are known to be a unified voice and an effective lobbying group.

Dick embraced library technology and pushed to have Alaskan libraries adopt the technology that was just developing. Of course, rural library development was a key priority for Dick and the State Library. Early efforts were experiments with some taking hold and others not. But many rural communities now have good access to resources as a result.

Dick could also be a traditionalist. When George arrived at the State Library in 1985, the library was bursting at the seams with books stacked along the floor and baseboard radiators. Since Juneau Public Library was taking over the Books-by-Mail program for the Southeast from the State Library, George suggested moving the public library-oriented materials to JPL. Dick was good with the idea until George also said that the literature section should go. Dick fumed and said “If a library does not have Shakespeare, it is not a library.”

Dick left a lasting mark on Alaska libraries and certainly left big shoes for all subsequent state librarians to fill.

William H. (Bill) Smith  
Head, Acquisitions  
Rasmuson Library, UAF, Retired

I consider Dick Engen to be one of the giants in the annals of history of Alaskan libraries for many reasons but mainly because of his humanity, his vision, and his role in the development of the Alaska Library Network, which embraces all types and sizes of libraries. In the spring of 1969 Dick and I were the only two Alaskans to be accepted for participation in a two-week Institute for Library Executive Development. It was held at the Lake Wilderness Center under the direction of Dr. Irving Lieberman, Director of the University of Washington School of Library Science. From that location we had a magnificent view of Mount Ranier, weather permitting. At the start of the Institute Dick arrived late. The next day we learned that his roommate, not having met him previously, exclaimed upon observing Dick getting ready to turn in “My Gawd, it’s an Alaskan bear.”

Dick was a man of many talents. I recall one time when I had traveled to Juneau that it was during the production of some historical drama (I don’t recall the title) in which Dick had a leading role at the local theater. An outstanding performance!! During his many of his trips to Fairbanks he was often a dinner guest in our home. On one occasion I recall he sat at the dinner table sharing crayons and a coloring book with one of our daughters. Joy in the simple pleasures.

There was also the time during the Northern Libraries Colloquy which was held in Fairbanks in 1976 when we hosted a group of attendees in our back yard. It was with horror we observed Dick slowly sinking through the webbing of one of our lawn chairs. We had known that he had a bad back.
but we didn’t realize our chair was that dangerous. He survived OK, as far as we know, for he never complained to us about the incident. For me, the highlight of many of the annual AkLA conferences was the State of the State Library Luncheon. Dick usually was rather dramatic in these talks. One year someone challenged him to give his presentation without the use of his hands. It was an obvious struggle for him, but he managed to do so. I will always treasure his friendship.

Peggy (Cummings) Forcier
Alaska State Library, Retired

Dick was larger than life in many ways…his booming voice, his infectious laugh, and his belief that anything worth doing ought to be possible.

He was a mentor in my first job out of college and encouraged me to make libraries my life’s career. In 1970, I was a 22 year old cheechako. I was hired by the State Library to be in charge of state and federal documents. That proved to be the first of many opportunities that I would never have had in the Lower 48 without prior library experience. Dick believed in potential.

When the State Library was going to change physical locations (from the State Capitol to the State Office Building), Dick called me into his office and asked me to be in charge of the move. I didn’t have a clue how to go about such a task. But his confidence in my ability made me work hard to prove him right. Dick gave you a chance to prove yourself.

When State Operated Schools disbanded and their large film collection was being considered for transfer to the State Library, Dick asked me to write a proposal to do so with a cost estimate that he said should probably be between a million and two million. To which I said “Dollars?” I was running the program for the blind and physically handicapped at the time and had a materials budget of $500. Dick trusted his staff.

He mentored me in so many ways.
• Do the best job you can every time.
• Set high standards for yourself and those who work for you.
• Constantly stretch to expand your skills and knowledge.
• Assume all your co-workers have valuable contributions to make.
• Don’t seek the spotlight but be a strong team player.
• Never think you’ve screwed up so badly that you can’t come tell him about it.
• Don’t take yourself too seriously.
• It is better to just do it and fill out the paperwork (or ask for forgiveness) later.

I remember Dick laughing heartily at my suggestion to have a bowl of Cheerios on the front cover of the new statewide union list of serials. He and I laughed, but Margaret gave us a look—like we were truant from high school—and we soberly agreed on a more traditional cover.

Dick’s support of Alaska’s libraries gave root to the Alaska Library Network. He encouraged cooperation and collaboration among all sizes and types of libraries. He funded and encouraged common goals, recognizing that there were too few libraries in the state to spend time and energy competing for limited resources. He supported the Alaska Library Association and made sure his staff had opportunities for active participation.

I left Alaska in 1981. And it was so nice to discover that on his retirement Dick and Rebecca moved to the Oregon coast. My husband Rich and I stopped in to see them there from time to time and share a martini (Dick made the best martinis). And for the last several years, they lived in the same community we did. We’d periodically get together and the talk
MT. VIEW—ANCHORAGE

The Mountain View Neighborhood Library, the newest branch of the Anchorage Public Library system, welcomed the installation of its 1% for Art project a year after opening.

The art piece by Daniel DeRoux, a Juneau artist, features geese flying (suspended from the ceiling) in a vee north. The geese wings are made of books. Patrons and staff all see different meaning in the piece: the geese fly North to the Future, the geese's wings are books and books help you take flight to a million new places, and much more.

Elizabeth Moreau
Mountain View Neighborhood Library

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Introducing Linda Gens: New Director of Ketchikan Public Library

Introducing Linda Gens as the new Director of Ketchikan Public Library: Linda Gens started her new position in Ketchikan on Oct. 19, 2011, successfully completing several rigorous “mind melds” with retiring director, Judith McQuerry.

A graduate of the University of Oklahoma’s School of Library and Information Studies, she recently served as Director of Library Services for the Guthrie Public Library from 2007 to 2011. Previous to that, Linda was a Library Consultant with the Office of Library Development for the Oklahoma Department of Libraries. She consulted with 35 municipal libraries and two library systems; she also served as Project Coordinator for the Gates Foundation’s Rural Libraries Sustainability Project. Linda also worked for the Metropolitan Library System of Oklahoma County as a Traveling Librarian, a Children’s Librarian, and an Adult Programming Librarian.

Linda has been very active in the Oklahoma Library Association, serving as chair of the Supervisors, Managers, and Administrators Round Table and the Social Responsibilities Round Table, and as a member of the Sequoyah Children’s Reading Team and the Public Libraries Division.

Linda drove with her two dogs from Guthrie, OK, to Prince Rupert, BC, and caught the Alaska Marine Highway ferry Taku, to Ketchikan arriving at 2:00 a.m. on a Saturday “morning”—one week after leaving Oklahoma. A vagabond by nature, she was intrigued by the idea of moving to Alaska because she enjoys reading about strong-willed women who take chances, and because she has always wanted to travel to Alaska—one of the few states she has not visited. Linda was immediately attracted to the Ketchikan Public Library because of the community support for the library which is shown by fiscal support, and the opportunity to help build a new library.

Now that she is actually here, she really likes the staff and believes the concept of the First City Libraries Consortium is a great example of what libraries are all about—sharing resources and ideas. Linda will be very busy finishing up the planning, construction, and moving into the new Ketchikan Public Library scheduled to open in 2013. However, she will be attending the 2012 AKLA Annual Conference in Fairbanks!
Homer Improves Emergency Preparedness through Library Award

The Homer Public Library, in collaboration with the Friends of the Homer Public Library and area emergency responders, held a month of activities in September aimed at increasing the community’s emergency preparedness thanks to a $5,000 award from the National Network of Libraries of Medicine.

On September 24, 2011, the library hosted a Community Preparedness Day. Area emergency responders were invited to give 15-minute presentations throughout the day to improve awareness about emergency preparedness issues. In addition, the public was invited to visit information booths operated by various agencies, including the Alaska Division of Forestry, the Homer Volunteer Fire Department, the Kenai Peninsula Borough Office of Emergency Management, and the Homer Senior Citizens.

One of the biggest draws of the day was the bright orange buckets, used to distribute 75 emergency preparedness kits funded by the grant. These buckets included a first aid kit, an emergency radio, and pamphlets from FEMA and the local veterinary clinic on how to prepare for an emergency. The bucket itself was a useful water-storage device. Community members, including

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the Homer City mayor, flocked to the library to pick up their buckets and then stopped by the booths to fill their buckets with more safety information.

Additionally, on Sept. 28 the library hosted a forum for survivors of the 1964 Good Friday earthquake to tell their stories.

More than a dozen survivors shared compelling stories to an audience of over 30 people, imparting wisdom and perspective about the very real risks faced by Alaskans living on the “ring of fire.”

Finally, the Homer Public Library is purchasing materials on emergency preparedness, self-sufficiency, and related topics for Alaskan do-it-yourselfers. The activities and materials funded by the outreach award have improved community awareness about emergency preparedness and put helpful tools in the hands of Southern Kenai Peninsula residents.

Ann Dixon
Homer Public Library
Carey Restino
Friends of the Homer Public Library

POLARIS—ANCHORAGE

Polaris K-12 School in Anchorage hosted mystery author J.A. Jance in its writers café in the Polaris Library. Jance spoke to students about how she gets her ideas, the writing process, and her life as a writer.

This was made possible by a school business partnership with Anchorage Sisters In Crime.

Ann Morgester
Curriculum Coordinator, Libraries
Anchorage School District
In the beginning of August, 35 library workers from across the state came together to sharpen their skills. Lynn Fields, Metadata Librarian/Assistant Professor at Southern Illinois University in Edwardsville and a trainer for MARC of Quality, taught workshops on MARC21 coding and Dewey Decimal Classification.

Attendees were diverse in their roles in the library, their backgrounds and experience, and the types of libraries they represented. While most attendees were responsible for creating or editing catalog records, many were new to cataloging.

MARC21 in Your Library is a two-part workshop consisting of a free online, self-paced portion and an instructor-led workshop. The training is designed for all types of library personnel. The first part explains what “bibliographic information” and MARC records are, how they relate to each other and library catalogs, why we need to know about them, and how to speak MARC. Interested individuals can find this at http://www.marcofquality.com/trn/trnindex.html. The second part covered indexed fields, display fields, coded fields, and number fields, and provided the 31 participants a number of practice sessions to apply the information learned. Workshop attendees learned how to read these fields and how these fields were used in the catalog and gained insights on why items might not be showing up in the catalog as anticipated. One participant commented, “I wish we had spent more time on the MARC stuff, but it was all SO SO helpful!”

Dewey Daze I and II took 22 library staff on a 3-day adventure through the 22nd edition of Dewey. Participants learned the history, principles, and arrangement of Dewey and how to use the Schedules, Relative Index, Tables, and Manual to check the appropriateness or build call numbers. The group also discussed local call number decisions and how they impact library staff and users, including when and how to shorten call numbers.

This training was funded by an Interlibrary Cooperation Grant from the Alaska State Library to the AkLA Cataloging Roundtable. University of Alaska Anchorage provided the space. “I am so grateful to AkLA, the Cataloging Roundtable, and especially to Ed Kazzimir, for bringing this set of workshops to Anchorage. It is a challenge to get sufficient training here in Alaska, and combined efforts helped a large group of us this time! The courses were terrific, and will help me do more accurate and correct cataloging. I am grateful to all the support given to us by AkLA and the Alaska State Library!” commented one participant.

Another participant added that workshops like these are useful and informative and wished we could “get more up here.” Workshops such as these help satisfy the training needs of staff in Alaska libraries. As another participant explained, “Being a new librarian, the task of cataloging can be a bit intimidating. With the skills presented at the MARC coding and Dewey Daze Workshops, I feel better prepared to make my cataloging and classification the

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most accurate that they can be.”  
A follow-up survey indicated that all respondents felt the training was useful and met their expectations. For a number of them, this was their first AkLA-sponsored cataloging workshop they had attended. When asked what other training they needed, respondents identified RDA (Resource Description and Access), LC Subject Headings, Book Blitz I-III, and cataloging special formats such as videos, sound recordings, and electronic resources.

Ed Kazzimir, Alaska Resources Library and Information Services  
Nancy Tileston, Anchorage Public Lib.

Lynn Fields, a trainer for MARC of Quality, taught workshops on MARC21 coding and Dewey Decimal Classification.
Ask Me Why I Hurt: The Kids Nobody Wants and the Doctor Who Heals Them, by Dr. Randy Christensen, 2011, is the unforgettable true story of a pediatrician who provides healthcare to homeless youth in the Phoenix area from a mobile van. This fast-paced and readable account of his medical and financial challenges, combined with anecdotes about some of his most memorable patients, will make you take a second look at the youngest and most vulnerable of your library patrons and think of ways you can do more to help. (Charlotte L. Glover, Ketchikan Public Library)

The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks, by Rebecca Skloot, 2010. Part biography, part science history, this book is about the amazing cells harvested in 1951 from a poor African Ameri-
husband, methodically terrorizes his family, animals and neighbors while Calla, Willadee and Toy Moses invoke the family trait for truth telling as needed. This book is fast paced, yet thoughtful. The Homecoming of Samuel Lake has elements of The Secret Life of Bees and To Kill a Mockingbird and is highly recommended. (Patricia Linville, Seward Community Library)

The Making of African America: The Four Great Migrations, by Ira Berlin, 2010. This book explains black American history in terms of interaction between movement and place, brought about by four great migrations. Americans of African descent have repeatedly been forced to leave 'home' and go somewhere they would rather not, then make that place home—until the next movement. The four migrations: 17th-18th centuries from African freedom to East Coast slavery; 19th Century from Tidewater to interior Gulf states Black Belt (the term referred to the area's dark soils, not to the people); 1914-1950 from rural South to urban North; and a 21st Century influx of Africans, once immigration laws enabled them to come. It's a new, enlightening way to understand this always fascinating issue. (Larry Hibpshman, Alaska State Archives)

The Alarming History of Medicine, by Richard Gordon, 1993. The author’s snide, contemptuous style is grating; I suspect it's for effect. Medicine has always been an affair of slow, fumbling progress accompanied by terrible and dangerous therapies and outright quacks. And some of the great innovators were themselves a little strange. Often they didn't really understand exactly what they had discovered. Still, I think I learned some valuable medical history. Gordon's list of 12 truly beneficial medical advances is very good. (Larry Hibpshman, Alaska State Archives)

A Dirty Job, by Christopher Moore, 2006. For Charlie, owner of a second-hand shop in San Francisco, the birth of his daughter and subsequent death of his wife are complicated by a new discovery: he has just become a "death merchant" whose job it is to collect "soul vessels" from the recently deceased so that their souls may migrate to new owners. In addition, he is pursued by man-sized raven-demons and adopted by two gigantic hellhounds insistent on guarding his daughter, who has developed troubling new powers. As in Lamb, which satirizes the Gospels, and Fool, which satirizes King Lear, both in a sympathetic way, Moore is irreverent and laugh-out-loud funny. Still, he is respectful of his topic (death) and offers us moments of warmth, tenderness, and understanding. (Paul Adasiak, UAF Elmer E. Rasmuson Library)

"Ad Lib" is a column published

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in the Ketchikan Daily News. This one, written by Judith McQuerry of the Ketchikan Public Library, appeared in the July 9, 2011 issue of the newspaper.

The readers of this column may know I am nuts for dog books. Almost any dog books will catch my eye, and I will read a dog story with great enjoyment. There is a new sub-genre of dog books at the library, Alcoholic Dog books. No, the dogs aren't alcoholic, the owners are, and they attribute their efforts at sobriety to the personality or behavior of their dogs. Both of these books are good reads if you love dogs. If dogs are not your favorite animal, these books are probably not for you.

Drinking with Miss Dutchie: A Memoir, by Ed Breslin, 2011. Breslin is an alcoholic, an editor, a survivor of clinical depression, and a book publisher, not necessarily in that order. He says he was resistant to Alcoholics Anonymous for over seven years and while he attended AA meetings, he didn't really get the program until he became the owner of Miss Dutchie. Breslin only bought Miss Dutchie for his wife Lynn and the first 72 hours with her almost killed him, but then he fell in love with the dog. Miss Dutchie taught Breslin how to have a zest for life, how to live in the moment and not borrow trouble from the future. Miss Dutchie disliked Breslin when he was drinking and smoking, and he credits her disapproval with helping him quit. Breslin's struggles with AA are as much a part of the story as Miss Dutchie. I learned a lot about AA from this book and have a few new favorite acronyms such as D.E.N.I.A.L.: Don't Even kNow I Am Lying. In an interview about his book, Breslin says, "Used in moderation, alcohol isn't the problem. Alcoholism is. If you're in the unlucky gene pool that winds up with it, you're not reprehensible for having it, but you're responsible for doing something about it before it does you or some innocent third party harm."

The other new one is: Bad Dog: A Love Story, by Martin Kihn, 2011. Kihn's dog is named Hola. She is a Bernese mountain dog. She is big, high energy, and needs training in the worst way. Marty's wife, Gloria, wanted the dog to be her best friend, especially since Marty was an alcoholic who was never there even when he was physically present. Hola becomes a holy terror due to lack of training and discipline. Marty's life is veering more out of control with drinking and Gloria is being terrorized and bitten by the dog. Gloria, believing nothing is going to help, moves out of the house. Marty will do anything to get her back. Marty gets into dog training with a vengeance. He decides that to get Gloria back, he and Hola need to attain the American Kennel Club's Canine Good Citizen certificate. Hola has already flunked puppy pre-school twice! Marty has no idea how to train a dog and there is almost no end of conflicting theories about how best to do dog training. Some trainers use rewards, some trainers believe if a behavior is rewarded, it is not really training. Even if Hola is trained, there are no guarantees that Gloria will come back to Marty.
ALASKA LIBRARY ASSOCIATION

SCHOLARSHIP FOR GRADUATE LIBRARY STUDIES

AkLA has established a scholarship program to support the education of librarians for Alaska’s libraries. The stated purpose is to provide financial assistance to worthy students pursuing a Graduate Degree in Library Science and to encourage graduates to return to Alaska to work in professional library positions. Preference will be given to an individual meeting the federal definition of Alaska Native ethnicity. The amount available this year is $4,000. The recipient will be announced at the AkLA Conference, February 2012 in Fairbanks. To be eligible for the scholarship, an applicant must be an Alaska resident who:

♦ possesses a Bachelor’s Degree or higher from an accredited college or university;

♦ is eligible for acceptance, or is currently enrolled, in a Graduate Degree program in Library and Information Science in a university program accredited by the American Library Association;

♦ is or will be a student during the academic year, semester, or academic quarter for which the scholarship is received; and

♦ makes a commitment to work in an Alaskan library for a minimum of one year after graduation as a paid employee or volunteer, or for two semesters for one semester’s financial assistance.

Completed applications must be received by January 15 of the award year. The application is online at http://www.akla.org/scholarships/index.html. If you have questions or need copies of the guidelines and application forms, contact:

AkLA Scholarship Committee  
Alaska State Library, Attn.: Aja Markel Razumny  
P.O. Box 110571, Juneau, AK 99811-0571

e-mail: aja.razumny@alaska.gov  
Ph: (907) 465-2458 or within Alaska, 1-888-820-4525. Fax: (907) 465-2665
BRING A MOVIE PREMIERE TO YOUR LIBRARY

Lapsit: the ideal venue

Best Beginnings is recruiting hosts for “100 Premieres” to be held Feb. 12-18, 2012. The 100 Premieres will be hosted all over Alaska to introduce Babies on Track, a 14-minute DVD for parents plus two companion baby board books. Using delightful images of Alaska babies on location around the state, the video and books foster early learning and healthy brain development at home in easy, convenient ways. All told, 7,500 sets of the DVD and board books will be distributed free throughout Alaska to families with children under two years of age. Premieres can be held anywhere families of young children gather, which means libraries are perfect venues. The premiere may be a special event or part of a regularly scheduled lapsit. The target audience is families with children under two.

For more information about hosting a premiere: BestBeginningsAlaska.org. Hosts’ responsibilities include organizing and publicizing the event. Every premiere will include showing the video; distributing the free baby books to participating families; modeling fun, brain-building activities for children; and helping parents write postcards to their legislators about the importance of early learning. Premiere hosts will receive free sets of the books and DVD ahead of time as well as a helpful host packet with step-by-step instructions and materials.

The fundamental principle behind Babies on Track is that the baby brain grows more in its earliest years – before three years old – than at any other time in human life. It’s also the time when language is taking shape in their brains. Talk, conversation, singing, and other forms of interaction are critical in this period. The video introduces a simple model families can follow in their own interactions with their babies:

T = Talk
R = Respond
A = Ask questions
C = Connect
K = Keep at it
S = Sing and tell stories

The more parents talk with their babies and children – the more conversation and interaction that occur – the easier it is for the baby to pick up language later.

They have larger vocabularies, and they’re ready for kindergarten by age five.

The Babies on Track books were made possible by grants from the Alaska Children’s Trust, The CIRI Foundation, and ConocoPhillips Alaska. The DVD was supported by contributions from the Alaska Department of Education & Early Development and Alyeska Pipeline Service Company. Both are productions of Affinityfilms, Inc.

Best Beginnings is a nonprofit advocate for early learning in Alaska. It is a statewide umbrella for Imagination Library, promotes and supports local early childhood partnerships, and produces and distributes materials and information for early learning. ❖

Barbara Brown
bbrown@bestbeginningsalaska.org
BestBeginningsAlaska.org
usually gravitated to libraries or Alaskans or both. He’ll be greatly missed --both personally and professionally.

Gary E. Strong
University Librarian
UCLA

There was no better mentor and later host than Dick Engen. I first encountered him as a newbie professional in Oregon when he was at the Oregon State Library, and I was at Lake Oswego Public Library. As I became involved with OLA, Dick and I often ended up at the same meetings and conferences. He had a great command of the spirits (of all types), and I learned from him. He would move on to Alaska. I would go through Washington at Everett Public and then the State Library.

Our time together in Western Council (including after my becoming state librarian of California) was a particular set of memories and highlights in my professional life. Given that Alaska and Hawaii were in Western Council, we all pushed to meet in the two every chance we could get. One such memorable meeting started in Seattle where we boarded the Alaska ferry (when it was still running) in the middle of a torrential downpour and moved out to make our way north. As we cleared the storm, we were under a full moon. The whales and dolphins were running along-side the boat and we were all at rail side watching. Needless to say, when we gathered in the closed bar the next morning to have the meeting, we were not in too good a shape. We proceeded on to Skagway, then Juneau, and on to Anchorage.

Dick was the most gracious of hosts. He even made light of the horrible entertainment at one of our stops where the owner’s daughter attempted to sing to us. The salmon was great though. There were times of visiting with Dick on his boat and sharing stories and drink. I so appreciate having known and worked with Dick. He was so important to my early and middle career. He will be missed.

Marvin Smith
Director (1975-1983)
Noel Wien Public Library, Fairbanks

In 1974, a library consultant with whom I’d worked on several building projects called to share his excitement about his participation in a splendid project...a new library in Fairbanks, Alaska. The city and state were looking for someone to take the job and he thought I should throw my name into the pot! Well, like most lower-48ers, my knowledge of Alaska was all “ice and polar bears!” However, despite a wave of negative advice, I discovered I had a real excitement about the project...and I applied.

A couple of weeks later I was informed that I had a visitor; John Carlson, the Mayor of Fairbanks had come to see me! Our “session” was really great, and he suggested I plan a trip to Fairbanks to talk to those connected with this “exciting” project. I later discovered Richard Engen of the Alaska State Library had been one of my champions. Things progressed rapidly, and I was hired to guide the new project.

Dick Engen was a constant resource during the three years that it took to complete the new Fairbanks North Star Borough Library. His experience, guidance, and willingness to wholeheartedly support this new venture were essential for its final success. Dick was a wealth of library knowledge, but always remained supportive of ways to encourage new and innovative programs to confront Alaska’s unique needs. I believe he saw the success of the new Fairbanks Library as a perfect opportunity to
continue expanding his dreams of statewide library services. Once the new library was finished, Dick encouraged me to take my new Alaskan experiences and reinvest them statewide; to this end he recruited me as a consultant to assist in the development of two new public libraries, Skagway and Nome.

Dick Engen’s recognized dedication and knowledge added a critical element essential for success at the state level in those turbulent times ... Alaska was oil-rich and everyone had a project for its betterment! Library services were fortunate to have his strong voice at the top ... always the “father of Alaskan libraries” says it all.

Mary Matthews
Former Northern Region Coordinator
Alaska State Library

I’m saddened to hear of Dick’s passing, and find it hard to believe this energetic, larger-than-life man was 82 years old. I was fortunate to have the opportunity to work at the State Library from 1971-1977 under the direction of Dick as the State Librarian. Dick was an inspiration to all, and especially to us young librarians just getting our feet wet in the profession. His dedication, creativity, energy, and passion for service helped mold our philosophy and our love for the profession.

Libraries share books? Universities and public libraries share? Of course! Dick made it happen. Books and tapes and films for everyone in Alaska? Of course. Books and libraries in airports and remote communities and on boats? Dick made it happen. Inter-library cooperation was Dick’s middle name, and in speech after speech he told us that by working together, Alaskans could have the best access to library resources. He was doubly smart to have Margaret Leibowitz as his Assistant, and together they and the staff did develop impressive and innovative services for our great State.

Dick was a serious librarian and also a really fun social guy. I remember one Fairbanks conference when some of us younger librarians were sitting around on the floor, late at night, in a circle, holding hands, pretending (or not) to be holding a seance, maybe trying to call up some spirit. Somehow this elusive activity stretched out for the entire night and Dick was happily part of it.

I will continue to remember and honor Dick as an important mentor and guide in my professional development.

Garth Graham
Former Director, Library Services Branch,
Yukon Territory, Canada

More than anyone else, Dick was my Alaska. My own take on the character of Alaskans comes from John McPhee’s “Coming into the Country,” where he describes a family who took apart a backhoe, flew it into a placer mining claim in parts, and reassembled it. In the Alaska Library Association, I found a group of people like that. They were confident, self-reliant, and alive to the possibilities to a greater degree than anywhere else, especially Dick.

But my actual association with the Engens was far more personal than professional. The Engens stayed with Annie and I in Whitehorse whenever Dick would come up with his drama club. And I stayed with them in Juneau several times, including their taking all of us Grahams and another family in tow when we got grounded by a snowstorm enroute to Maui. I have a vivid memory of staying with them in their home on the motor trawler in the
harbour. I was impressed that they had unencumbered themselves of all the things of house living in order to fit into a boat. I particularly recall the sense of well-being I got when I woke after a hard night of Alaska Library Association carousing, peeked out the porthole, and saw a seal staring back at me.

With Dick, I always felt an easy acceptance, leavened with exceedingly witty banter and wry laughter. He was larger than life and he was my friend. I was enhanced in his presence.

Audrey Kolb
Northern Region Coordinator
Alaska State Library, Retired

Dick Engen both believed in the value of libraries of all types and supported their establishment and development throughout the state. Alaska gave Dick the opportunity to implement his philosophy. Before Dick retired, the pipeline had been completed and lands were allocated to the various native tribes enabling tribes to become more independent from the Bureau of Indian Affairs.

The new village governments needed to develop laws and regulations to support local services, including the responsibility for a public library—and the State library facilitated this process both with the legislature and at the local level. State and Federal grants helped to construct new public libraries, and the State Library aided in obtaining grants for construction, purchasing a collection, and implementing training programs for village library staff.

The Mollie Hooch verdict required any village with ten students of high school age to have a local high school, which meant new school buildings with new libraries, again assisted by the State

The University of Alaska developed a community college system, which also required new buildings with a library in the villages. Again the State Library was involved, though in a more limited way. Dick Engen at the State Library and Ted Ryberg, Library director of the University of Alaska Fairbanks, had similar philosophies of cooperation among libraries of all types, and the two men made a great team. They left a legacy of improved library services that extends throughout the state of Alaska.

Nancy Lesh
Consortium Library, UAA, Retired

Colleague, mentor, and most importantly, friend; that was Dick Engen to me. He came to the State Library about the same time I started my first professional job at the Anchorage Community College Library in 1968. I don’t remember interlibrary cooperation being a topic discussed at all in my graduate library program; but it was just a year later that Dick’s State Library published Library Service for All Alaskans; A Statewide Library Development Plan.

Dick embodied interlibrary cooperation and the stage was set for the development of the Alaska Library Network. I feel incredibly lucky that I was there to join these early efforts, mentored and encouraged by Dick, who led by example. I’m glad to say I was able to incorporate these ideals into much of my professional work at the Anchorage Community College, the Consortium Library, and in AkLA.

The 1970s and 1980s were heady years of major

(Cont. on pg. 21)
and grateful for his friendship. I miss you, Dick!

Paul McCarthy, Professor Emeritus
University of Alaska Fairbanks

I have two particular memories I would like to share, one humorous and one to illustrate why Dick was such a positive, long-term influence in Alaska libraries. They are both from his much earlier years in Alaska. One time several of us were sharing drinks in the back bar in one of the Juneau bars during an AkLA conference. We were teasing two guys (fishermen) as they were playing pool several feet from our table. They then disappeared and returned hiding something behind their backs. Suddenly one of them dropped a large King Crab on the table. The crab started scrambling up the table and we all headed backwards scattering beer, wine, and other drinks to avoid the crab. In the end, Dick and Rebecca were the only locals so they took the crab home and cooked it up at 3:00 a.m., and then graciously fed AkLA participants at their home later that day.

One of Dick’s early efforts once he joined the State Library was to quickly visit libraries in Anchorage and Fairbanks (and elsewhere) to introduce himself to the various librarians and to learn more about the libraries in Alaska. I had the opportunity to welcome him at the airport on his first trip to Fairbanks. Dick de-planed and briskly walked into what was then a much smaller airport building. My eyes must have been as big as saucers! Dick, so used to the climate of the PNW, arrived in a ubiquitous Puget Sound style trench coat. Unfortunately, it was December and the temperature here ranged around -43°F! I was stunned; Dick took it all in stride! We were able to outfit him with more substantial gear and I don’t remember once when he complained of the cold as we visited various libraries.
in Fairbanks. He immediately gained a great deal of stature in my eyes.

What I remember most about Dick is less a particular instance but rather an attitude, perspective, and a vision he brought to Alaska—that we could all be better by collaborating and cooperating—his perspective that Alaska was a Library and we all had a significant role in our mutual success despite our somewhat different missions. He helped to fundamentally change the climate and the relationships between and among Alaska libraries. Dick was the kind of person that whether you met with him alone or in a group, in the end you felt better about yourself, your work, and the almost limitless capabilities of Alaskan libraries when acting collectively.

I had written an invited paper for the Society of American Archivists critical of the State Library’s archival role and responsibility as a follow-up to Posner’s *American State Archives*. Nevertheless, Dick invited me to work with him, Dick Freer in the Department of Administration, and Paul Kohl from the Seattle branch of National Archives and Records Service to revitalize the state’s Records Management Program and articulate legislation that would formalize a State Archival Program. Freer invited Paul Kohl because he was intimately familiar with the ups and downs of Alaska’s efforts in the field.

Dick, Dick Freer, Paul K., and I discussed legislation, placement, responsibilities, a raft of other considerations, and the need for a comprehensive approach. In the end it came to a decision of administratively placing the newly proposed State Archives and Records Management Program. Dick knew of Dick Freer’s intense interest and commitment and agreed to house the program in Administration providing that the program would be headed by a professional archivist. Dick Engen’s role in establishing the State Archives was crucial! I think Dick knew that the archives would get its initial support better through the more comfortably-funded Department of Administration. I think he also knew because of his extensive experience in Oregon that once the focus of Administration changed as new personnel took over, eventually the program would find its real home in the State Library.

There are lots of humorous stories best shared over drinks. I remember his love of the boat he and Rebecca designed and had built and eventually moved into. He was excited about his new to-be home. If he were to sail off into the sunset…which he did…it would be with the person he loved and on the ship they both designed to harbor in the PNW which he enjoyed so much.

Sue Sherif, Alaska State Library

In February of 1981, I was aboard an Alaska Airlines flight to Nome. Excited to attend a library conference in Alaska after several years as a school librarian in an Alaska town of 500 people, I hadn’t been to a professional gathering of any kind for several years. But now, as a new employee of the Fairbanks North Star Borough Public Library, I was given the opportunity not just to attend my first AkLA conference, but to visit Nome. As we flew to the first off-road community that I would visit in Alaska, I was excited and clueless as I knew very few other librarians and not much about Alaska except the area around Denali Park.

Seated to my right in the window seat of our half-cargo, half-passerenger plane was a gentleman in a suit, the only person on the plane so formally dressed. The bearded guy was a bit disheveled, hair a little wild, suit a little crumpled, perhaps the effect of a late night or a very early morning. Definitely not a librarian, I decided.

(Cont. on pg. 23)
As he snoozed, I read until my fellow traveler woke with a start and turned and said, “Dick Engen, and you are…” After I responded and we exchanged a few pleasantries, I learned that Dick was indeed a librarian, and not just any librarian but the State Librarian. In the days before the web, Face Book, and even television in a large part of Alaska, there was little way to know who the State Librarian was, much less what he looked like.

As one of the newer librarians on the scene, I was suddenly a bit intimidated and managed to stammer out some sort of praise of the work of the Northern Regional Coordinator, Audrey Kolb. Audrey had been my professional lifeline when I worked as the only librarian between the Mat-Su and Fairbanks, so I was genuinely impressed that the State Library cared enough to send its librarians out to consult with us who worked as the only librarians in our communities. There was no email (although university libraries seemed to have some way of communicating electronically), so the telephone consultations, a couple of in-person visits, and a set of microfiche that were supposed to be read on a state-supplied reader (which had disappeared from the school library before I had arrived) had been my tangible connections to the State Library.

Dick talked with enthusiasm about his team of consultants and the work of the library staff in Juneau, about state funding for public libraries, and new library building construction thanks to new state bonds. This was my introduction to a man who not only had a passion and vision, but the energy to make libraries in Alaska collaborate and flourish and become recipients of the immediate post-pipeline gush of oil wealth.

That 1981 Nome Alaska Library Association conference is still a fond memory for those of us lucky enough to attend the inaugural meeting at the “Nome Mini-Convention Center” (which only recently had been the Nome bowling alley.) But a memory that burns brightest for me is the sight of the King Island Dancers leading an invitational dance, and there up on the stage in front of the drummers was Dick Engen, now in jeans and a plaid shirt, throwing himself into the dance with all the enthusiasm that was his hallmark as a leader.

David Hales
Head, Alaska and Polar Regions
Rasmuson Library, UAF, Retired

Dick Engen had many fine abilities, but two that impressed me most when I first moved to Alaska in 1972 were his foresight and the ability he had for getting all types of libraries to work together in an effort to provide the best possible library service to all the people of Alaska. I was really impressed by this because I moved to Alaska from Pennsylvania where academic librarians never spoke to the public, special, or school librarians. Each had their separate annual conference. I worked at Temple University, and although Philadelphia is filled with many great colleges and universities, each was very protective of its own collections, etc. At that time they could not even work together to establish some collection development policies amongst themselves.

I appreciated the fact that Dick was always willing to listen to new ideas about improving library
(Engen - Cont. from pg. 23)

services in Alaska. However, in his own special way he would thank you for your ideas, but would be forthright in telling you if he did not agree. Another great attribute I admired about Dick was that he was always so cordial, outgoing, and friendly to everyone. Whenever I saw him at a meeting or a conference he always greeted me and made me feel that he was genuinely glad to see me. He had the ability to make everyone feel the same way. He moved around and really knew how to work a crowd.

Although I had not seen Dick for many years, I will forever appreciate all he did for Alaskan libraries, and he will always be one of the Alaskan personalities that I will never forget.

Nola Andress, Librarian
Spenard Community Lib./Spenard Public Lib.
1960-1976, Retired

I did like him a lot and thought he did a tremendous amount of good for libraries. I can’t remember how soon he came to Anchorage to visit libraries but it was not long after he was appointed. He had a fresh style: “Sure it can be done—we just have to figure out how and when.” And of course I was astonished that he came to visit the very small Spenard Library. He also sent a representative to visit us and see what was needed. She was a very gracious lady from California. As far as I know he responded to every inquiry from various libraries. I believe he was responsible also for starting up some of the outlying libraries.

*Note from Nancy Lesh:* Nola also told Barbara MacLean recently how Dick took the time to sit down and talk with her and to encourage her shortly after he started. “She has very warm thoughts of him,” Barbara reports. The “lady from California” was Phyllis Dalton, Assistant California State Librarian, who served as special consultant for the *Library Service for All Alaskans; A Statewide Library Development Plan* (1969).

Nola’s daughter Loretta Andress (editor of *Newspoke*) recalls that her mother was so impressed that this person (Dalton) would come to such an insignificant place as the Spenard Library that she later sent her a small ivory carving—a common token of appreciation in those days...

Barbara MacLean
Anchorage Public Library, Retired

In March of 1973 on the coast of Maine, my fiancee declared he was going back to Alaska and asked if I would come. He showed me a picture of Homer on the cover of Alaska magazine with mountains reminiscent of Colorado, where I had lived for four years before heading east, and the ocean, which I had learned to love in Maine. It looked and sounded like the next great adventure. I immediately wrote to all the libraries in the

(Cont. on pg. 25)
Anchorage area as well as the State Library. Much to my surprise, the only reply I received came from Dick Engen, State Librarian. That letter was so Dick. He welcomed me to the State, but joked that I was making a serious mistake in not choosing Juneau over Anchorage. The public library system in Anchorage was opening two new branches soon, he said, and referred me to Tracy Allen, the branch coordinator at the time. The rest, a 25-year career at AML, is history.

When I later got to meet Dick in person, he confirmed my initial impression. He was an energetic visionary on a mission to give Alaskans the best library service possible. He could inspire a room full of people with that booming voice one moment and the next talk to you one-on-one with complete attention. A true leader, Dick had big goals, the drive to see them accomplished, and the charm to enlist others in the cause.

I never regretted choosing Anchorage over Juneau. (Apologies, my Southeastern friends.) I do wish I had had more opportunities to work with Dick directly during those wild times of such rapid growth and change. I remain forever in his debt for the kindness of that all-important reply.

Diane Brenner
Anchorage Museum Archivist
1975-2001, Retired

The first few times I attended Dick Engen’s “State of the State Library” address at an AkLA conference, I heard the “what’s up in Juneau” talk. But as time progressed he turned his talk into “the state of the state’s libraries,” an address you didn’t want to miss. He was generous with his praise. He would gleefully acknowledge library workers (who cared if they were Professional Librarians?) who had successes to announce. A great kids’ program.

New money in the sock for expansion. New skills brought home after specialized training. Staff changes, particularly if he’d poached someone for statewide responsibilities.

He wanted to KNOW what was going on in his libraries, and he bragged about ANYONE’S progress. Sometimes the library under his glass didn’t recognize its own cleverness or see implications for others, but he knew what the neighbors needed and could point the way.

How did he learn all this? He hired good program people as his eyes and ears. He was a master at working the crowd. He gossiped and chuckled and visited at conferences and meetings. He traveled. He read reports and grant requests. And he paid attention. From his perspective as state librarian he could see needs and networks that needed resources. More than once I saw him talk up a challenge, get people to “buy in,” throw in some cash and then crow at their success. Lasercat, the workhorse CD database that replaced everyone’s card catalog, is a prime example.

He was a great advocate for libraries, librarians, and books across the state, and we could depend on him make it work.

The Emily DeForest anecdote:

Emily was a business woman who became librarian at the Kenai Library. Stout and jovial, she always wore open-toed high heels, even in the dead of winter. One winter day on Dick’s first visit they eventually went off to lunch at the joint around the corner. The waitress greeted them, handed Dick a menu and asked Emily if she wanted “the usual.” “Sure” says Emily, thinking “it’s the Thursday Special.” Dick, not paying much attention, said he’d have the same thing. Emily had forgotten that the Thursday Special came with a cocktail. And there she was, entertaining the newly-met State Librarian over a mixed drink at lunch.
She often said that she and Dick were the best of friends, with an ornery chuckle.

Isabelle Mudd
Alaska School librarian, Retired

When I arrived in Fairbanks in July 1964, one of the first things Ted Ryberg told me was that Alaska had a library association which I would want to join; he was aware I’d been active in local, state and national associations in my former home, Syracuse, N.Y. I was volunteered to chair the 1965 conference program where I met Margaret Bell as well as the State Librarian, who had not been involved in ASLA. We sent her a special invitation to speak to the librarians about the State Library. She saw her role as maintaining the State Library in Juneau for state government. She questioned me why the founding librarians called it the Alaska STATE Library Association since the State Library was not asked if they could and the State Library was not involved. The membership meeting had under 20 (my memory says 15) in attendance.

My next memory is dropping the STATE from the Association’s name so it became AkLA.

And my next memory is meeting Dick Engen, the new State Librarian. It was obvious from the beginning that Dick considered all the libraries in Alaska to be the responsibility of the State Library as well as the State Library in Juneau. Phyllis Dalton, California Asst. State Librarian, came to Alaska on Dick’s request to work on an assessment of the library needs of the state and draw up a plan for the State to follow to improve library service in Alaska.

The plan divided the State into three areas: Northern, Southcentral, and Southeast. Each designated area had strong libraries to be there to help the others in their area and between areas. Now there was a plan uniting all Alaskan libraries and librarians. And we had a State Librarian, Dick Engen, concerned with improving library service for all Alaskans. The Alaska Library Association (AkLA) was energized and began to work toward common goals. Better library service for all Alaskans!

As one of those librarians, Bill and I moved to Kotzebue to administer a library/media center for the Bureau of Indian Affairs school there. Our goal was to show the students and adults in the village what a school library should be. Support for our program included a collection of recordings from the State Library and the loan of electric typewriters from UAF to help in cataloging library/media materials. Surplus books were loaned by Elmendorf Air Force Base Library.

We then moved to Bethel to establish library/media services for over 30 schools in the BIA in Southwestern Alaska. There was grant money to help purchase materials, but there was also a lot of cataloging (this was before computers). Only a cataloger could appreciate the help of the State Library in making copies of my main entry cards so my staff could add the headings! In that way we built a complete card catalog of our print and media collections.

Dick set the standard for the Alaska State Librarian. Always ready to listen, always ready to offer help, and always relating to the needs of Alaskans, no matter where they lived. The public/school library had been tried unsuccessfully in upstate New York, but when tried in rural Alaska it worked.

Dick loved to laugh—even when the joke was on him! There was one story about a late night or early morning encounter with a “huge” live king crab. The
picture he made as he told about chasing the crab around the lawn trying to slow it down to be cooked kept us all laughing.

At an AkLA meeting held at Alyeska Resort we were treated to a ride in the chair lift. That was when Dick and I sat down together on the way down and I discovered he was afraid of heights. I hoped it would help if I talked all the way down. I never did know if it helped to distract him but hoped it did, and he was too kind to tell me to be quiet.

As new State Librarians are selected we can only hope they have the courage to remember that the State Librarian services all libraries in Alaska—not just the one in Juneau, and not just the large libraries but those in rural Alaska as well. Just remember Dick’s legacy!

Note from Nancy Lesh, AkLA Historian: The plan Isabelle refers to is the Library Service for All Alaskans; A Statewide Library Development Plan, 1969. The name of the Alaska Library Assoc. was changed from Alaska State Library Association to our current AkLA in 1968.)

June Pinnell-Stephens, Collection Services Manager, Fairbanks North Star Borough Libraries, Retired
Dennis Stephens, Assoc. Prof. of Library Science Emeritus, Rasmuson Library, UAF

Dick’s vision and his positive, optimistic support of the Alaska Cooperative Collection Development project in the early 1980s was key in what became a significant multi-type library cooperative project that attracted national attention. His idea was to involve all types of Alaskan libraries—not just university, not just public. It was a revelation. We found ourselves talking with folks outside our own cribs about collection building, as we realized that the value of expanding the compass of the project was huge.

This multi-type library approach to cooperative collection development was Dick’s vision. The availability of full-text online databases and e-books, and cooperative license negotiation for journals, have changed the terrain. But Dick’s insistence on inclusion and his confidence and optimism changed the nature of library cooperation in Alaska. Dick had a deep influence on our lives, and June and I send our heartfelt condolences to Rebecca.

Margie Thomas, Librarian, West Valley High School, Fairbanks, Retired

Dick always reminded me of a 19th century buccaneer—big and gusty, flamboyant, with a tremendous smile and a sense of ease and familiarity with his chosen surrounding - building library services in Alaska. We arrived in Alaska about the same time—the middle 1960s. As the Post Librarian at Fort Wainwright at that time, I had little contact with most of the rest of the Alaska library community, except through the Alaska Library Association. Through AkLA, and later during my stint at Rasmuson Library at UAF, and then as the Librarian at West Valley High School in Fairbanks, I had the wonderful opportunity of working with him as he and Ted Ryberg plotted and planned the State Library’s efforts to expand library services to all Alaskans—including the school children in schools from Ketchikan to Barrow.

What a wonderful supporter, mentor, and leader he was. I had the opportunity of working with the AkLA group that developed the state’s first Inter-Library Loan code—which included provisos for allowing school children to request (through their school library) needed or desired material from other library collections in the state—a first for the nation! Dick recognized the importance of school libraries in the development of shared collections
and services to benefit all Alaskans, as later evidenced by the State Library support for West Valley’s participation in an interlibrary cooperation grant with the Fairbanks North Star Borough Public Library.

He also supported the West Valley ‘Talk to an Astronaut’ program using the brand new audio-conferencing equipment. Students at our school, and students from 18 other schools throughout the state, were able to speak with astronaut Vance Brand in May 1983, shortly after his return from commanding the space shuttle Columbia. Dick was truly a librarian for all Alaskans, and those of us who worked with him continue to benefit from his buccaneer spirit and his wisdom and guidance.

Sharon West
Former Head, Access Services
Rasmuson Library, UAF

Dick was a force of nature. By the sheer strength of his personality, he made things happen. He had a loud, boisterous voice, an even bigger laugh, and an outsized personality. He was made for Alaska and Alaska was perfect for him. Getting in on the ground floor building libraries for an entire state was like catnip for a cat; he LOVED it.

I know he worked very hard—witness the things produced during his years as state librarian—but I don’t really remember ever seeing him “working.” What you saw when Dick was at his peak performance was a librarian so enthusiastic about libraries and what they could do for the citizens of Alaska that he could barely contain himself. And he needed that enthusiasm and endurance—he got in on the ground floor of library development and that ground floor was pretty bare. Dick’s enthusiasm played a major role in convincing others to get on board and work for the goal.

On a personal note, Dick loved art. When I worked with him, he and Rebecca lived on a boat and he hung his art collection on the walls of the State Library. Dick had great taste in art and the State Library has never looked better, before or since. When Dick retired and took his art collection with him, it left a great artistic void in the Library. During the AkLA convention in Nome, Dick gave me and my husband, Gene, an excellent piece of advice. We had been considering whether to buy a very expensive ivory carving while we were there in Nome. We were discussing it with Dick and he said, “...I’ve never regretted a piece of art I bought but I have often regretted the ones I didn’t buy...” Gene and I took those words to heart and our walls are now covered—thanks to Dick. Actually, that is pretty good advice for living a life.

Ron Lautaret, Retired
Assistant Director for Public Services
Consortium Library, UAA

I know many people were confused when meeting the Alaska State Librarian for the first time. He wasn’t quiet or shy; his voice was clearly audible in the back row of the auditorium. His laugh rumbled like thunder from deep inside and he loved to laugh. He was active in community theatre. He lived on his BOAT, for God’s sake. Dick Engen was not a man you could easily categorize or ignore. Dick believed that libraries and ideas were important and that every person had a right to access information regardless of where they lived. He also had a plan for a library network. You could never win an argument with Dick. He would look you in the eye, look sincere, and scratch his chin while you stated your position. His response

(Cont. on pg. 29)
was always: “Yes, but...” Clearly, Dick was one of a kind.

Sherry Taber
Former Director
Egan Library, University of Alaska Southeast

Rather than a particular incident or occasion, when I think of Dick Engen I see a man whose sports jacket is in the office (to be worn only when absolutely necessary) but whose wide smile that starts in the eyes and encompasses his face, indeed his whole being, is offered in greeting. The eyes crinkle, the beard and bushy graying hair and the shoulders all reach out and envelope you in their warmth. I hear his deep, fun-loving laugh that usually accompanied that cheery smile. I feel his enthusiasm as well as his probing intellect, pushing the boundaries of the possible to deliver ever-better library services through a combination of personality, tradition, and innovation. I see a dedicated librarian and natural leader living in a great state taking on the challenges of distances between communities by breaking down communication and resource barriers to bring us all together—audio conferences were an everyday occurrence and over time so were microfiche catalogs that combined collections of multiple libraries, and then computer networks that became the norm in libraries.

Through Dick’s dedication, charisma, leadership in cooperation, and vision we collectively created the Alaska Library Network we know and cherish today. While legendary, he had both feet on the ground (or the boat deck!) and was accessible and inspiring to staff, colleagues, politicians, and the public. It was for the lives of all citizens of both his day and the future that he wanted libraries and their services to be accessible and relevant. It was a pleasure to know and work with Dick Engen.

Ron Inouye
Editor, Bibliography of Alaska
Rasmuson Library, UAF, Retired

In 1979 State Librarian Dick Engen and I were part of the Alaska delegation attending the first White House Conference on Libraries and Information Services in Washington D.C., called by President Jimmy Carter. We cooked up the idea of presenting Amy Carter (then age 12) with a beautifully calligraphed and framed poem entitled “Invitation to the Library.” We were in one of the hotel exhibit rooms which Amy Carter and her school mates were visiting. As they approached us, Dick and I stepped forward to present the gift to Amy. Several Secret Service guys abruptly stopped us. After explaining we wanted to give the poem to Amy, the Secret Service folks took it after she and her classmates passed by. I never found out if Amy received it. It was a memorable if not arresting moment with Dick!

Robert Geiman, Former Director
Rasmuson Library, UAF

Above all, Dick was a leader with a heart. His impact upon library service in Alaska was simply amazing. Many of us know a substantial part of his achievements. Yet, none of us begins to know the full scope of his work and accomplishments. He was never one to boast but he certainly displayed pride in Alaska and its ever stronger library service.

Ted Ryberg, Sherry Abrams, and I first met Dick 44 years ago at the PNLA Conference in Coeur d’Alene. Our task was to see if we could interest this dynamic young man from Oregon to consider being a candidate for our State Librarian position. To everyone’s delight, the process went smoothly and quickly. We had our leader!

An early evidence of his leadership was that within
two years we had Alaska’s first State Plan for Library Service. This Dick used as the cornerstone for years of steady progress.

I liked Dick’s smile. I liked Dick’s laugh. I liked Dick’s involvement with the “Little Theatre” group in Juneau. I liked Dick’s living on a houseboat. And, so many more “likes”!

It was my distinct privilege to have known and worked with this great man. I miss him.

Alden Rollins
Professor Emeritus
University of Alaska Anchorage

“I am a river to my people,” shouted the sheikh to his people in the movie Lawrence of Arabia (1962). The soldiers yelled their approval, and shot off their guns. Similarly, Dick Engen, the dynamic and lovable and wily operator who headed the State Library for (it seemed) a hundred years or so, was a bearer of gifts and visions and hope to librarians everywhere in Alaska, especially rural Alaska.

He was a tireless traveler, passing out books, grants, interlibrary loan assistance, microfiche readers, hugs, whatever he had to help unify and magnify Alaska library service. His State of the State Library speeches at the annual AKLA meetings were always a highlight and hugely attended. There he was indeed cheered and applauded year after year. We will not see his like again. Take a final bow, Dick. Your people are still applauding.
FLY WITH A BOOK

Because Alaskans fly a lot, the free “fly with a book” program started in Alaska airports. In Southeast Alaska, the “book boat” was used to deliver library service to small villages and logging camps. In 1986, Dick retired after 19 years. He’s often referred to as the “father of Alaska libraries.”

In 1996, Dick was presented an Honorary Doctor of Letters by the University of Alaska Anchorage. In their words, “The University of Alaska is honored to recognize his foresight, hard work and dedication to the state of Alaska.”

http://www.legacy.com/obituaries/statesmanjournal/obituary

General guidelines to publication in Newspoke, Alaska Library Association newsletter:

Not accepted: paid advertising; material intended to “sell; make a profit” rather than to “inform.” Submissions viewed as advertisements, unless item is of particular interest to Alaska, Alaskan patrons and/or libraries, or is submitted by an AkLA member.

Accepted: Alaskana–books, book reviews, or articles relating to, or of interest to, Alaskan librarians and/or their patrons. Informative material related to libraries and librarianship, especially in regard to Alaska.

Most anything submitted by AkLA members–reasonably “tasteful and well-written,” of an appropriate length (much leeway here); author is willing to submit to possible editorial changes, which may include length, spellings, downsizing of convoluted sentences. . . (Editor will make every effort to let the author know of, and pre-approve, any significant changes before the material is published in Newspoke.)

Other–determined on an individual basis by “the committee” (defined as a group of at least three AkLA members). If the Newspoke editor or the individual submitting has questions or concerns about any submission, the matter will be sent on to the Newspoke Committee.
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CALENDAR

American Library Association Midwinter Meeting, Dallas, TX Jan. 20-24, 2012
Public Library Association’s 14th National Conference, Philadelphia, PA Mar. 13-17, 2012
American Library Association Annual Conference, Anaheim, CA Jun. 21-26, 2012