

## **A Brief History of the Round Valley Public Library**

We are a rural community at the end of the highway, across the ravine, an hour's drive to the next town--that is to say, just a bit past beyond. Our valley consists of one small town, an Indian reservation, and ranchlands--an economically depressed region of California, in one of its poorest counties, a place forgotten. Some of our residents have never left the valley, many more have never ventured to the county seat, let alone to such exotic places as San Francisco or Los Angeles.

What began as a book exchange out of the trunk of a car, in 1978 turned into the Covelo Community Library, housed in the former self-service laundry. The library, financed through various fundraisers, struggled to maintain itself with limited hours and a small collection of donated and purchased books.

In 1990 our library was adopted into the county library system and gained some stability. During that time the library worked with the local tribes to combine their library collection with that of the public library, and became a much-needed information center for under-served segments of the valley, helping to draw together much of our divided community.

Endowed with a secure environment and stable finances, the Friends of the Round Valley Public Library created a visionary project dedicated to funding the future construction of a new library. Two leading citizens gathered biographies and photos of early-day Round Valley inhabitants, both Native American and White settlers, and prepared a history entitled Families, published in 1997. The seed money gradually grew to \$100,000.

Many more years passed, while the library site became increasingly plagued by roof leaks and mold, forcing us to look for new options. In June 2006, the few Friends put their heads together and proposed a bold vision for an all-new library, and in no time at all the stalwart group of four increased to more than twenty dedicated hearts and minds.

Over the next five years the Friends of Round Valley Public Library raised more than a million dollars, purchased and remodeled the almost 7000 square foot Round Valley Inn, turning it into a library, commons room, coffee shop, patio, and storage facility. The library uses 55 percent of the new building, a space more than twice the area of the old library. While not all of the space in the new building is the library proper, it all serves to augment the services of the library or to raise money to support library projects.

The library commons is now integrated into every facet of our community.

- Our radio station combined with 24/7 WiFi access has broadened our reach for local and world knowledge and offers limitless horizons to our youths and seniors alike.
- Our bilingual branch librarian has opened her arms to make our Spanish-speaking citizens feel welcome, and our local Native American youths are developing animated shorts to help preserve our heritage.
- Our media room makes possible satellite conferencing to help with court appearances as well as seeking legal council, tax help, and resources for needy mothers.
- Our commercial kitchen is used to teach nutrition classes and host a monthly food bank.
- Partnering with the regional community college, we are able to offer extension courses as well as online courses.
- Our Chamber of Commerce hosts and maintains our website.

- Individuals in the community with knowledge to share offer informal mentoring and hands-on classes in everything from origami, to help in reading, to computer literacy and radio programming--and even such inspiring programs as the one offered by the lead animator at Disney to help open the imaginations of budding artists.
- We host ongoing art shows to highlight local artists, and bring in collections from the outside featuring artists of world renown.

And the result?

While it is a slow process, we are seeing old wounds beginning to heal and people coming together, often with some trepidation. We are finding that we are able to develop the spirit of volunteerism in our young, ensuring a healthy future for our community. Much to our surprise, this has turned out to be a bit like the old tale of stone soup--some toss a bit of knowledge, some a bushel of good will, some a bounty of labor into the soup of our community and we all benefit from the banquet of newly found alliances and long-forgotten hope.

