

September 29, 2013

Library Journal's Award for the Best Small Library in America
Library Journal
160 Varick Street, 11th Floor
New York, NY 10013

Re: Letter of Reference for Round Valley Public Library nomination for Best Small Library in America

Dear Judges:

The Round Valley Public Library is, without a doubt, The Best Small Library in America. For over thirty years it has developed to meet the ever-changing needs of the rural and geographically isolated Round Valley community. (The nearest town is a challenging one-hour's drive with hairpin turns and sheer drop offs.) The library began in a small rented space and now is part of a much larger Round Valley Library Commons, providing connection within Round Valley as well as to the larger world.

This accomplishment is the result of a core of loyal supporters, involved for more than thirty years, providing historical perspective and long-term connection to the Round Valley community. Equally important is the continual integration of new supporters and new members from Round Valley. Together they identify ever-changing community needs and locate resources to meet those needs: the established residents providing stability and the newer supporters encouraging adaptability.

This recommendation is based on over thirty years experience in public, county, and international school libraries and a forty-year connection to the Valley. Though only a full-time resident for 10 years, I witnessed and, at times, participated in the Library's evolution.

During the late seventies, the Covelo Community Library was established to meet the reading needs of a new gathering of writers, teachers and families working and settling in the Valley. Fortunately, the first library was created by a trained, though volunteer, librarian, and a place for the reading community was created. A majority of the initial library supporters still contribute to its continuing existence. Many have been loyal for over 30 years! The annual Blackberry Festival 5K race, established then as the main fundraising event, continues today.

By the late eighties the Library was at a tipping point; too small to serve the broader community (especially the Native American – 38% of population—and ranching communities) and unable to flourish. At this time, members of the Library represented Round Valley on the Mendocino County Library Advisory Board, providing an appropriate venue to express their community's needs. A new and visionary County Librarian began to work with Friends of the Covelo Community Library and members of the larger RV community to “stabilize” the library. With the award of the “Partnerships for Change” grant, the structure and funding was available to bring all Round Valley together. Through this process, the volunteer Covelo Community Library transitioned to the Round Valley Public Library. Financial support was minimal, with grant writing and fund raising a continuing necessity, but inclusion into the County system encouraged growth and development. The Friends of the Library was strengthened and broadened with a wider base. This visionary group set a challenging goal to develop a fund for the construction of a new library. Long-time residents, Floyd Barney and Elmer Bauer, took the challenge seriously. They gathered local biographies and photos of both Native America and early white settlers into a book entitled Families as a fundraiser. With such enthusiasm, the fund grew to \$100,000, an exceptional amount for this small, rural community.

Then, in 2006, the RVPL Friends were presented a comprehensive and visionary plan developed by new residents. The scope was extensive and the financial requirement challenging. Their proposal to develop a Round Valley Library Commons would provide stability for the library as the focal point of a new community center. It would allow for inclusion of much needed technology and space to house and highlight the Native American collection. Instead of constructing a new building it called for the renovation of the vacant Round Valley Inn, employing local contractors and artists and benefiting the community economically. The Commons would provide rooms for community events, a commercial kitchen and space for a coffee house, all resources to bring the community together. The RVPL deserves the title, Best Small Library in America, because this rural community of approximately 3,000, old-timers and newly arrived, worked together to raise the money to make this idea a reality. They raised over \$1,000,000 and the Round Valley Library Commons became a reality.

The RV Library Commons provides stability for this rural community while ensuring adaptability to the changing world. It provides a venue for gathering and, thus, for generating new projects for Round Valley's specific needs and desires. Two examples are the new local radio station, KYUB, 96.9 FM, broadcasting local news and programs of local interest, and the Round Valley Community Seed Bank. Thus the coming together and generation of new ideas continues. Make sure to stay tuned to the Round Valley Library Commons, Best Small Library in America!

Sincerely,

Charlene Holbrook

