

September 22, 2013

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

Re: Round Valley Library nomination for Best Small Library - letter of reference.

Dear Judges,

It is my pleasure to write this letter of reference for the Round Valley Library. I used to work for Mendocino County but I have many years as a director in other rural libraries.

There are many elements that I think make the Round Valley Library an outstanding candidate for the Best Small Library. I'd like to highlight two which I think stand as comparison with many other small, rural libraries.

The first is the depth of community support. When this library was being conceived and built, the Friends of the Library sought input from and the support of as many people in the community as possible. In this tiny isolated area, the Friends and supporters raised over a million dollars through 950 separate contributions, over 750 of these donations of \$100 or less. The median household income in Covelo (where the library is located) is \$29,000. Compare this with the \$61K median household income for California and \$52K nationally. This meant the local residents' investment was huge. Everyone in the community owns this library. I have been a library director for 15 years and have not seen this kind of local support.

The second is what the community and the Friends have done with this money. I'm sure you'll see pictures of the new facility. The stamp of local, skilled artisans is in every room of the building. It is light, bright, welcoming and graceful. When you drive down into the beautiful Round Valley, the effects of neglected infrastructure are visible but you wouldn't know it when you enter the Round Valley library. It is a self-sustaining community hub.

The Friends own the building and pay for its maintenance through fund-raising and rental space. The facility has a community room, a patio, a community-supported radio station and it is home to the Farmer's Market. It even has a licensed commercial kitchen available to residents which spurs the local economy. There is a small coffee shop on the premises which sells local goods along with the mochas and lattes. All of this is truly amazing.

The community and Friends saw a need to have a central place which would draw residents and visitors and help revitalize the downtown. They did it and more. I'd say the Round Valley Library is the best small library in America.

Sincerely,

Melanie Lightbody
Butte County Librarian/Director of Libraries

