

WA public libraries are nifty @ 50!

On Sunday 21 November 2004, public libraries in Western Australia held a public celebration to mark their 50th anniversary as part of the Fremantle Festival. Called *Resonate with Libraries* in line with the theme of the Festival, the celebration was a free family event and was a big success.

Of course, public — or circulating — libraries in one form or another have been around a lot longer than fifty years. However, it was in 1954 that the first public library opened under the auspices of the *Library Board of Western Australia Act*.

York was the very first public library to open under the *Library Board Act*. Many more rapidly followed and today, stretching from Kununurra to Exmouth, there are more than 238 public libraries around the state. Some operate with a few shelves in council offices; others are state-of-the-art treats for library customers.

All of them provide very special services to their communities by enriching, inspiring and connecting people to information, reading and lifelong learning.



Monika Kos, Channel 7, sharing A Cat called Maisie with young listeners

To celebrate this important milestone a program of free events was put together that involved the whole family. The day included readings from Perth celebrities and WA authors, face painting, craft activities and entertainment from consummate performers such as Keith McDonald, Annie the Clown and Glen Swift. Guest readers

included the Minister for Culture and the Arts, and Monika Kos from Channel 7.

It was a busy and very successful day with approximately 1000 people visiting over the four hours to listen to readings, explore their artistic talent, collect balloons, make badges and have their faces painted if they were particularly brave.

Red balloons with the proud statement 'I love my library' could be seen all over Fremantle and, for the first time ever, librarians walked the streets of Fremantle handing out balloons, stickers and invitations, promoting public libraries to the community. One brave librarian even ventured into the pub — another first I am sure!

Not stopping there, equally successful events took place in Geraldton and Bunbury with crowds of more than 300 at each event.

Like any event, the day would not have been a success without a number of very enthusiastic, tireless volunteers behind the scenes. The working committee, made up of Michelle Ledger from Cambridge Library (chair), Rebecca Moore from Joondalup, Denise Barker from Belmont (the pub wanderer), Joanna Andrew and Viv Barton from Stirling, and Judi Willmott from Canning, worked for three months planning the event. On the day, an extraordinary number of volunteers from libraries all over Perth pitched in. Their help was invaluable.

Resonate with Libraries was a first in many ways for public libraries. Reaching 50 is of course one first. Running our first co-ordinated public event was another. The collaborative effort from numerous councils, whilst always an integral part of our working relationship, has never come to the fore as much as it did that Sunday.

The role of the public library in the community is vital: opening up access pathways to literacy, infor-

mal and formal learning, and being a crucial link to our digital future. By promoting the importance and enjoyment of reading and by offering shared community spaces in an increasingly diverse society, the local public library is a vital part of rural, regional and metropolitan WA. Its place in WA society needs to be celebrated and, on Sunday 21 November 2004, we did!



The Resonate team: L-R: Michelle Ledger, Viv Barton, Rebecca Moore, Denise Barker and Judi Willmott



L-R: Luisa (Joondalup), Deb (Wanneroo) and Joe (Joondalup) conquer the badge-making machine (well, almost...)

Grateful thanks are extended to the many people who supported the event with financial contributions (including WALGLA and Civica as well as many local government authorities), to the volunteers and to those who provided moral support on the day. And, well done public libraries — I for one am looking forward to public libraries providing services that are even bigger and better over the next fifty years!

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Some of our wonderful volunteers packing up, and still smiling!