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Library Talking Points

Dec. 12, 2009

Good Morning, Mr. Mayor and Members of City Council:

I am Dr. Oscar Fitzgerald, Vice Chair of the Alexandria Library Board

I represent the 166,000 holders of library cards which is one card for every man, woman, and child in the city plus a number of reciprocal library card holders in the surrounding jurisdictions. The largest constituency in the city

I am here to urge you not to significantly cut the library budget. On a national average the Library is a cheap investment: about \$31 per patron or the cost of one good book

Last year the Library suffered a \$2 million cut, the largest budget reduction on a percentage basis of any City Department. We are operating on bare bones: (1) we had a 5% reduction in materials budget while our usage has increased 10% to about a million books and other materials checked out last year (2) staff reductions of 20% last 2 years.

All these reductions occurred despite increasing demands in these hard times.

There are over a hundred events in the libraries each month:

1. Meeting rooms: for a cross section of civic organizations and volunteer groups
2. Children reading programs – both in the library and at venues such daycare centers all around the city
3. ESL classes
4. Literacy training: When I needed a place to hold tutoring sessions for my student I used the library

Something for every age group:

1. Security: Books on home fire protection and home security
2. Job searches
3. Elementary and High School projects
4. Health questions: Info for the illness
5. Computers: 80% utilization mostly by people under the poverty line whose only access to this modern day necessity is through the library program
6. Shear pleasure: Inexpensive entertainment to forget about the cares of the day in these tough economic times

A recent thank you note from one of our less fortunate patrons says it all. Let me quote:

Thank you very much! Your wonderful books and warm inside help me survive.

Please make sure all Alexandrians survive and keep the Library doors open for maximum usage and the shelves stocked with the latest materials. THANK YOU