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Long Beach Public Library Foundation

By Margaret Durnin, Naples resident and founding member of the Long Beach Public Library Foundation Board of Directors

It's hard to imagine that, just 30 years ago, the Internet was not yet a daily part of our lives. Parents still took their kids to the library to check out their weekly armload of books or to do additional research beyond the set of World Book encyclopedias at school. Readers checked out mystery books or asked the librarian for the latest travel information, exotic cookbooks, or stock market reports. Finding books on tape, reading newspapers from everywhere, and seeing photos of old Long Beach were a delight.

The Long Beach Public Library Foundation formed in 1996, with support from Mayor Beverly O'Neill, the Friends of the Library, and then-director of Library Services, Cordelia Howard. It was clear to them and to others that Long Beach needed more



Margaret (far right) and Charley Durnin present Vic (second from right) and Patty McCarty with the 2019 Durnin Family Award for their dedication to libraries and literacy at the Library Foundation's Grape Expectations gala on June 9. Photo courtesy of the Long Beach Public Library Foundation

than a library building with books and willing, caring, knowledgeable librarians. Cutbacks that began with Prop 13 impacted many city services. Suddenly, there was a need for supporters of literacy and education to help supplement, through donations large and small, what Long Beach could not provide for its 12 libraries.

extra dollars to fund additional children's books, thanks to the generosity of the first donor, and audio equipment, thanks to another bequest. Little by little, gifts of all sizes were donated.

At first, the Library Foundation added

In 1999, the Library Foundation set up the Family Learning Center program, available at each of the 12 public libraries. Generous donors paid for homework helpers, some who spoke two and three languages, and computers for students and adults alike to complete homework, search for jobs, fill out applications, fine-tune their résumés, and access other much-needed resources online.

The Library Foundation has since grown to fund early literacy programs like Dive into Reading, Homebound Reader Services for those who cannot visit a library, scholarships for adults earning their accredited high school diploma through Career Online High Schools, 3D printing, graphic design, adaptive technology for those with disabilities, and annually supplied books and materials via endowments that include Gutenberg, Ken Slaybaugh, and Chris Burcham.

Over the last 12 years, the Library Foundation has helped spearhead efforts to supplement resources for Long Beach's three newest libraries: the Mark Twain Neighborhood Library, the Michele Obama Neighborhood Library, and the recently opened Billie Jean King Main Library, for which the New Main Campaign has raised over \$2 million so far to support technology, programs, and enhancements.

The Library Foundation has been fortunate to have supporters from all across Long Beach. From children donating to Mayor Bob Foster's Quarter Campaign to small bequests left by those with modest means, and, recently, a very generous donation by a gentleman raised in Belmont Heights that will help fund the Family Learning Center program for many years to come.

Those who have given to the Library Foundation do so because they believe in the important role that a library plays in a city. The library presents opportunities for individuals who wish to learn and more fully enjoy life. For many, it is a gateway to a better future. ■



History-making tennis champion Billie Jean King, who grew up in Long Beach, at the Sept. 21 opening of the Billie Jean King Main Library, 200 W. Broadway. Photo courtesy of the Long Beach Public Library

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