SRRT Statement of Concern on the Use of Flags in Libraries' Public Areas

The Social Responsibilities Round Table (SRRT) [of the American Library Association] recognizes that the U.S. flag ordinarily is appropriately, proudly and respectfully displayed according to custom and law in libraries and public institutions. The display of the colors is a formal matter which is meant to represent the sovereignty and unity of the nation.

However, the aggressive display of flags in unusual places, in unusual numbers, and in an unusual manners might be taken to imply, among other things, institutional endorsement of current U.S. governmental policies. Privileging symbolic speech in possible support of current U.S. governmental policies tends to undermine the library as a place of free thought and compromises the neutrality of the library space. Such unusual displays may create an intimidating atmosphere for some library users who may be deterred in their requests for materials and assistance. SRRT urges libraries to be sensitive to these concerns.

SRRT Action Council
January 19, 2002

The Library Juice Manifesto

The Library Paradigm:

Libraries are special because they are at once communitarian, libertarian, and models for sustainability.

They are communitarian in the economic sense because they are built on solidarity. A community pools its resources in order to share them.

Libraries are libertarian in the social/intellectual sense because of the ethic of intellectual freedom, which says that all ideas should be included and nothing censored.

This combination of economic communitarianism and social/intellectual libertarianism creates the ideal support system for a democratic society, because the library provides everyone with access to ideas and provides access to every idea.

In addition, libraries are models for sustainable systems. By following the "borrow, don't buy" ethic, libraries provide an alternative to consumerism, an alternative to environmentally unsound overproduction and spiritually unsound overconsumption.

And libraries are further exciting because they need to be changed. They tend to leave out alternative or street-level materials; there is presently a tendency toward privatization of services and functions (with attendant barriers to access); libraries and library organizations need their decision-making processes democratized; access to local community information in libraries needs to be improved; in general, libraries tend to depart routinely from their founding principles as they struggle for a handhold in the environment of an increasingly neoliberal political economy and an increasingly reactionary social climate. We need to advance the Library Paradigm of information organization, preservation and access, to freshly propagate the idea of the library in society in terms of its underlying principles.

Notwithstanding their imperfections, libraries serve as a rare example of beautiful ideals actually functioning successfully in the world. This means that libraries should serve as a model for other institutions and endeavors. We need to spread the Library Spirit across society and teach it, as a model for positive change beyond the walls of libraries and throughout all contexts of information, communication, and learning. This is the Library Paradigm, and we can make it grow.

Library Juice is at http://libr.org/Juice/