

Greening Libraries

By Monica Antonelli and Mark McCullough (eds).

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Reviewed by Frederick W. Stoss

Libraries have an institutional integrity that surpasses nearly every work setting, except perhaps those in which we find physicians and health care providers. Our libraries represent the first tried-and-true networked information infrastructure serving the public good for many decades and in many areas, from the strengths of their collections to the services they provide. Since the 1960s and the 1970s, libraries in particular championed public understanding and participation in the new areas of environmental awareness and activism, especially through the efforts of their professional associations, such as the American Library Association and the Special Libraries Association. Libraries became, evolved and remain the source of credible and timely data and information related to a myriad of environmental topics and concerns to the communities and stakeholders they serve. The issues handled by librarians range from use of pesticides and household chemicals to waste management strategies for small and large quantity generators of hazardous wastes, acid rain to global climate change, atmospheric ozone depletion to changing salinity gradients on the oceans, from endangered species to destructive extraction of the last petroleum and coal reserves, and much, much more. In recent years there has been an upwelling of interest in the roles libraries play in assisting individuals, neighborhoods, and communities with improving the ecological and environmental conditions to better meet the demands of allocating natural resources, selecting food, selecting alternative transportation strategies, implementing energy conservation and alternative sources, and embracing other

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quality of life indicators to reduce their impacts. The 21st Century measure of these actions is the ecological, carbon, or CO₂ footprint.

The response of libraries and librarians in meeting these new demands on their collections, services, facilities and expertise evolved in the 1990s to the present, as the Green Library Movement. These new environmental and energy actions are often umbrella-ed under the term or concept of environmental or energy sustainability or sustainable communities. Librarians rose to the challenge in providing new ways of thinking and acting with the great intentions of providing library users with tools and strategies outlining principles and practices for Green Living and promoting the broadened concepts of Sustainable Communities (the American Library Association's 1999-2001 Libraries Build Sustainable communities Program was a tremendous show of foresight). These professional interests led many libraries and librarians to develop print, digital and virtual collections fostering Green Collections and Green Programming. Above and well beyond these fundamental and perhaps more traditional library and librarians functions are the rigorous and inventive means by which librarians educate the greater public (stakeholders) including elected officials, community leaders, teachers and educators, environmental activists, business managers and planners, and academics in public and private institutions with the means to understand the necessity with which green living practices reduce their impacts of the environment and at the same time save not only diminishing resources, but also provide savings to budgets from individuals to homes to communities and farther.

Monica Antonelli and Mark McCullough edited an outstanding resource demonstrating how libraries and librarians effectively handled these challenges. Their 2012 book, *Greening Libraries* (Litwin Books at Library Juice Press, P.O. Box 25322, Los Angeles, CA 90025; inquiries@libraryjuicepress.com; litwinbooks.com, 270 p. ISBN 978-1-936117-08-6, \$32.00) is the first book providing a chronicle of the Green Library Experience and a detailed accounting of the history and the future of Green Libraries (and the "Green Librarians"). Twenty chapters in three sections comprise this important work. "Green Buildings" is devoted to an overview of the decade-long efforts in replacing older and smaller libraries, built as part of the Carnegie Libraries of the late 19th to the mid-20th Centuries and those post-Carnegie Libraries built in the building boom decades of the 1960s and 1970s. These are constructions made to capitalize on smart energy use and environmental design, largely through the efforts of the Green Building Council's promotion of LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) Certification. "Green Committees, Services and Programs" represents the stories of individual libraries' and librarians' efforts to establish a "green ethic," as a major component of the operations, and as effective educational and informational tools to promote energy-smart and environmentally-friendly actions and activities in library programming.

The last section of *Greening Libraries* is a reflection on librarian and library actions that stimulate and hopefully sustain an ethic towards practices that challenge and resolve personal to collective (from households to communities, to associations, and beyond) commitments towards living that Greener Life Style.” It is of particular note that the last two chapters are as inspirational as they are informative.

Promotional information for this book includes a comment, “*Greening Libraries* offers an overview of important aspects of the growing green library movement, including, but not limited to, green buildings, alternative energy resources, conservation, green library services and practices, operations, programming, and outreach.” It is without exception that this book does much more. Not only does it stimulate librarians into thinking about the roles their libraries and fellow librarians play in promoting attainable goals for a living in a greener society. *Greening Libraries* should, over time, become the cornerstone of a foundation of library literature transcending other academic disciplines in environmental studies, urban and municipal planning, government policy and decision making, and other areas of cross disciplinary exchanges of ideas that sustain the concepts for living those greener ideals at all levels and in all places where people work, go to school, live, and play.