

**EXCERPTS FROM SALLY GARDNER
REED'S LECTURE "THE POWER OF
FRIENDS: RAISING SUPPORT FOR
YOUR LIBRARY AND NON-PROFIT"**

*Reed spoke in Indianapolis on
November 21, 2003, on support for libraries*

Transcribed by Janice E. Gustaferra



"I think that we are at a very critical juncture with libraries.... We have challenges coming from the federal level in terms of policy making that's not always library friendly and, of course, we have the economy and the money, which I think is more seriously threatened than ever before. Many of you may have heard that even during the great depression there isn't at least any known case of a library closing and yet today they're threatened everywhere."

"The privatization of publicly funded libraries is a new wave and it concerns me.... The people who make decisions for library funding... are really looking to save money, it's not that they're looking to make the libraries run better."

"The majority of state libraries have had very deep cuts.... The Minnesota State library was zeroed out of the budget.... How can it be that a state like Minnesota would decide that they didn't need a state library? So the times are really challenging."

"At Friends of Libraries U.S.A., we're as ... concerned with advocacy as we are with fundraising.... Fundraising is wonderful.... Very often, it's for the big projects, or else it's the icing on the cake, it really shouldn't be for operating budgets. The reason I say that is because you cannot sustain that model.... The other reason is: I deeply believe that public libraries, in particular, are a cornerstone of our infrastructure, our tax supported infrastructure, because they are an essential service."

"When I think about the dangers facing libraries, I'm actually not very pessimistic even though I think the environment is very unfriendly right now.... The reason is because I hearken back to the time of Carnegie.... What I find so incredible about the Carnegie era isn't the largess of Andrew Carnegie, as wonderful as that was, it's actually what happens after he made the grants available. It was really a people's movement in America ... because he didn't just wave a check and libraries appeared. He offered grants for a building. The people had to decide a number of things. One was that they had to tax themselves 10% in perpetuity for their operating budget.... Also, they had to come up with the

funding for the site, and find the site, and they had to come up with the collection and the furnishings.... Many of the cities ... didn't have enabling legislation to tax themselves for libraries ... so a lot of state laws had to be changed and that meant a lot of advocacy on the state level as well and, because of that, laws were changed across America.... It was largely a women's movement."

"Having been a library director in the past, I always had to make the case at the local level with my city councilmen who were, pretty much without exception, not library supporters. It's pretty much of a truism that the people who make the decisions are not library supporters."

"The big thing that we have is a lack of appreciation for the important role libraries play in a democracy and in the communities. And until we get that message across, I don't think we're going to have very much luck in this environment. The competition is very keen for tax dollars and libraries are not faring as well as they should. Coming, again, from the public library world, I think we have a tremendous case to make and we have failed to make it first of all, for life long learning, but particularly for the zero to five year old learning and their parents. Understanding the rate of illiteracy in America is shocking. It's estimated to be about 25%.... We're sending a lot of money and a lot of our energy overseas because we consider it a matter of national security. The issues of national security are right here and we are failing to address them. We cannot continue to compete in the marketplace, let alone be a world leader, when we have 25%, and growing, of our citizens who are illiterate."

"Studies have shown without any contradiction that children who enter kindergarten without a book rich environment are far behind those who have one, and most never catch up. Eighty percent of America's dropouts are functionally illiterate. Eighty percent of America's prisoners are functionally illiterate. Kids who come to school prepared to learn make it through the system. And if you think about it, the only agency in the community that opens the door to new parents and new children, without barriers at all is the public

library. The outreach that they're doing to ensure that new children, from birth, have access to books and learning is tremendous. But, of course, it carries through throughout our lives. And we know this, and we're trying to make the case, and we're not making the case.... With a 90% approval rating, how are we losing the case?"

"I think the first thing that librarians have done is actually assumed everybody understands, loves them, and understands how important they are and have not worked very hard to get them out on the radar screens, not just for decision makers, but for Americans in general.... The library as a central place becomes more and more invisible because access to the resources becomes easier and easier to get in remote locations and so it's easy to sort of forget what's at the center of those resources. So I think it's very, very critical that libraries start really getting out there ... getting the word out to the community not just about what you have, but why what you have matters to the community.... We talk about having story times, but we don't ever talk about why story times matter.... We have to start getting our message out there loud and clear about why what we do matters."

"The second thing that library users and librarians have to do is unite their voices and act. It really is critically important.... I really feel that if we don't start advocating, we won't have anything to advocate for."

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Janice E. Gustafarro, MLS student, Indiana University School of Library and Information Science – Indianapolis. A video file of the full talk is available via the Web at http://video.indiana.edu:8080/ramgen/ip/itvideo/sally_gardner_reed.rm