News

'A library is an arsenal of liberty' anon.

In this issue:

2009: A Record Year for the Nepal Library Foundation

By Naresh Koirala, President, Nepal Library Foundation

Two thousand nine was a significant year of growth for the NLF. In 2008 we had raised about $30,000 and were engaged in fifteen library/learning centre projects across Nepal. The challenge for the New Year was to consolidate the projects from 2008 as well as to continue to develop new initiatives. At a board meeting in early January Alison Bird, who had been involved with NLF since its charter and who had been helping with administrative work and leading our fund-raising efforts in Vancouver, joined the meeting. Dr. Shiva Gautam also participated via a conference call from his home in Massachusetts,

A villager in Nangi , Myagdi Distict writes an e-mail on a computer supplied with a grant from the NLF, NRN Russia and Help Nepal Net in collaboration with the Nepal Wireless Network. She is learning to read and write by e-mailing her son in Dubai . See article Challenges to Library Development on p4 (photo P. Bird)

Open Learning Exchange Completes First Stage in e-Pustakalaya Development

Open learning Exchange Nepal (OLE) has completed the initial round of deployment of the first Nepali language digital library the e-Puatakalay (www.pustakalaya.org). The NLF committed $17,000 in 2009 and will continue to fund this extremely well run and managed project. We intend to expand our funding of this project and are seeking donors . Although used mainly in Nepal, Nepali world wide can access this resource online. It is one of the few, if only, source s of Nepali language literature available on the web. If you are a Nepali speaker living abroad and would like to expose your children to quality Nepali language resources we urge you to look up the e-Pustakalay online and consider donating to this worthwhile project.

Report (continued from p1)

USA. Shiva is a professor at Harvard Medical School and has been in charge of NLF"s school net-work project since it started in mid 2008. At this time Alison and Shiva were also appointed to the Board of Directors.

With the start of 2009 funds were raised in several ways. Alison continued to promote the sale of Paperblanks journals donated by our sponsors, Hartley & Marks, Inc. She motivated many volunteers to join her efforts and raised over $12,000. As well as this, non-resident Nepalis (NRN's) all over the world added their support. By far the biggest contribution ($12,000) came from NRNA, National coordination Committee, Russia followed by the Nepal German Friendship Association, courtesy of Ram Thapa, NRNA VP. NLF's sponsors in Canada also continued their contributions. Sutherland School of North Vancouver went one step further and organized a 36 hour fast for charity by its senior students. The money raised went to the NLF and the Buddha Academy in Kathmandu. The in-volvement of so many young Canadian students and Alison's volun-teers, and the concern they demonstrate for the betterment of soci-ety world-wide, was most gratifying to us in the NLF.

NLF Directors continued on-site promotion of NLF by presenting slide shows at the ANA conference in Oakland, California and in Calgary, Canada as well as through e-mails. All this effort paid off handsomely. It is encouraging to note that, since starting its work in 2006, NLF has raised nearly $100,000 .

As the NLF has become better known requests for support from local libraries have started to come in. We realized the need for a strategic plan to classify our projects and to develop a funding pol-icy. The work in this regard is underway. It had also become appar-ent that we need a resident representative in Nepal who would act on NLF's behalf and participate in its expansion. As of September, 2009 Mr. Sharad Babu Shrestha, President of the Nepal Reading Association and a well known person in library circles has joined NLF as our representative in Nepal. With over twelve years experience in library and community development, Sharad will be responsible for vetting applications for NLF support, monitoring NLF projects and developing NLF net-works in Nepal and abroad. We are very excited to have Sharad with us.

The achievements of the NLF in the past three years have sur-passed our expectations, but we are aware that there is an almost infinite demand for libraries and, therefore, what we do will never be sufficient. We have tens of applications for NLF funding in our files. We thank you all for your generosity and look for your continued support.

Students and villagers use the NRN, NLF and Help Nepal Net supported computer lab in Nangi, Myagdi district

Sharad Shrestha Joins NLF

Mr Sharad B. Shrestha has been appointed the NLF local representative. Based in Kathmandu, Sharad will coordinate and initiate NLF activities in Nepal. Sharad has over 25 years experience with development projects and has worked with USC Canada, Save the Children US, and the Goethe Institute. Prior to joining the NLF he was with READ Nepal for 12 years and was recognised by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation for his work with READ which led to the awarding of the Gates Foundation 2006 Access to Learning Award to READ.

He is currently the president of the Nepal Reading Association, a member of International Reading Association (IRA), and a member of IRA/IDAC Asia Committee,.He is also a member of International task force Group of ALADIN,UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning, Hamburg, Germany. Sharad also currently serves in various roles in several other national and international organisations in Nepal and elsewhere.

Computers received from NRN Russia for Nepal Wireless Project

By Dr Mahabir Pun, Director, Nepal Wireless Network

In 2008 Nepal Wireless received 32 computers with LCD monitors from NRN Russia representative Dr Jugal Bhurtel who handed them over to Mahabir Pun and Nani Ram Basnet, Principal of Arunodaya Secondary School, Pharping, at the secretariat of NRN in Kath-mandu. These computers were then distributed to 12 schools in Kathmandu, Myagdi, Kaski and Makawanpur.

NRN Russia along with the Nepal Library Foundation also supported Nepal Wireless in helping to build two networked thin client com-puter labs, with five computers each, in schools in Nangi and Tikot villages of Myagdi district. Help Nepal Net (HeNN), an NGO based in Kathmandu, provided technical support to set up the labs using the LTSP (Linux Thin client Server Protocol) open source networking software. They also trained two teachers from those schools and carried out follow-up visits. These were the first networked labs set up in Myagdi with Linux as the operating system which Nepal Wire-less plans to install in all its computers.

Thin client hardware and LTSP networking software offer a means to provide very cost effective, easily managed and maintained IT re-sources for basic IT uses such as the internet and learning.

Nepal Wireless would like to sincerely thank NRN Russia for their support of computers in the schools of its project sites. These schools would be unable to buy computers with their own resources.

An Exemplary Community and School Library in Begnas Tal

An exemplary school and community library, Rias's Reading Room, (RRR) is up and running in Sundaridanda, the village next to the Begnas Tal resort. It was brought into existence through the coordinated efforts of Mr Arjun Parajulee, manager of the Begnas Tal resort and Ms Wanda Vivequin of Calgary and was named in memory of Wanda's mother. RRR is the NLF's first affiliated library .

A client of RRR enjoys a quiet read after school

Tourists from the nearby Begnas Tal resort are encouraged to visit the school and library and, if time and the moment allows, to read and work with the children in the school. One of these tourists, a county librarian from the UK wrote in the visitors book that RRR is as well equipped and run as any school library in the UK.

After a recent visit to RRR we heartily concurred with this observation. RRR stands as a model of what a school library could be in Nepal.

NLF to Support Digital Library Access for Society for Kathmandu Valley Public Library

In line with its goal for promoting use of the digital e-Pustakalaya resource developed by Open Learning Exchange Nepal the NLF has budgeted $1000 for the installation of a local server for the SKVPL's computer network, NLF's first library investment in Nepal.

The purpose of this installation will be to gain experience in the technology and usage of the e-Pustakalaya and similar resources. From this we hope to be able to offer, in collaboration with OLE, similar local server based digital resources to libraries across Nepal. The cost of installation includes updates , data backup and training.

Beni Community Library Opens

Users at the NLF supported Beni Community Library

The Beni Community Library opened earlier this year after a number of delays caused by rising construction costs and availability of materials. The library development was coordinated by READ Nepal. The NLF allocated $5000 towards supplying books, library supplies and other resources.

NLF Makes Initial $1500 Donation to Prakash Community Library

The NLF has agreed to assist in the renovation of the Prakash Community Library (PCL). Situated in a small community close to Dhulikel in the Kathmandu Valley, the PCL was established about 60 years ago with donations sufficient to buy land, put up a building and stock it with books. The library ceased to function some time ago and the building has since sat in a state of abandonment and disrepair.

A local resident, recognising the desperate need in the community for a library, approached the NLF for help. He led the creation of a committee of local concerned citizens which is the governing body of, and responsible for, implementing the project. The cost for building renovation, S9,000 was taken on by the community and the NLF allocated $3,500 to provide books and library supplies. As well the NLF will provide advice and support in creating a plan for self sustainability.

Self sustainability is the key to ensuring that a library can grow and prosper. Most libraries in countries such as Canada are supported by a local tax base. Such a tax base does not exist in Nepal so to ensure that there are funds to keep the library running it is essential that a business plan and money making venture is in place prior to the opening of the library. The PCL committee has completed a significant part of the renovation of the building and is currently working on creating a viable plan for self sustainability that will ensure the income it will need to pay for staffing, maintenance and growth. This may involve the raising of further capital.

A significant portion of the funds we have allocated have been raised by students at Sutherland High School in North Vancouver (see article below). The NLF is in the process of establishing a twinning program with high schools in Canada in which students who raise money for a library can see how their donations are spent and the effect that their efforts have on the community.

Information about the NLF

The Nepal Library Foundation is a registered Canadian charity:
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Challenges to Library Development in Nepal

By Paul Bird, Secretary, Nepal Library Foundation

As an organisation we receive many requests to help communities develop libraries. Education is seen by these communities to be the key to prosperity and libraries an important community educational resource.

The picture on the front page of this newsletter illustrates how, with access to the right tools, a villager is learning to read and write using e-mail. She is situated in a supportive learning environment with a room full of literate and IT knowledgeable young people who provide the necessary help when needed.

A recent study conducted by the University of Washington School of Information Science shows that in 2009 77 million people over the age of 14 in the US used public libraries as a primary access to the internet for educational, health and career development purposes (see www.gatesfoundation.org/press-releases).

That a similar need and desire for access to ideas and knowledge through the medium of public libraries exists in Nepal cannot be questioned.

We have identified four main areas of concern as significant issues that are of crucial importance in the support and maintenance of libraries in Nepal (and probably anywhere else in the developing world). These are *sustainability*, *training*, *mobilization* and *advocacy*.

Sustainability: There are, and have been, significant efforts put into library resources in Nepal. With the exception of the sustainable model developed by READ Nepal most of these resources have no means for sustainability or development once the support of the donor organisation is withdrawn. It is vital that any library have reliable financial resources and a viable business plan to support the services it provides. Without this, whatever is in place is likely to disappear once the initial investment is made.

Training: Putting libraries into place without suitable training of personnel who are to run the library, or even use it, is almost certain to result in significant underutilisation or even failure of the resource. Training in IT skills, basic librarianship, management, and marketing of the library resources are all needed. As well, many teachers in Nepal do not know of -and have never been shown - the great benefit of a library in promoting a culture of literacy in a classroom. We have seen well equipped libraries next to schools standing empty throughout the school day. The idea that a library is a valuable classroom adjunct is largely unknown in Nepal.

Advocacy: A coordinated effort is needed to establish the development of libraries as a national goal. Tax revenue and developmental aid needs to be systematically applied to provide the necessary infrastructure for public access to information. How this can take place in an equitable and sustainable way is a major problem that needs to be addressed as soon as possible.

Mobilisation: It has been said that Nepal does not have a culture of reading for pleasure. Books are a rare and expensive resource. Libraries need to be designed and marketed to meet people's needs.   Teachers need to be shown how a library can be used to support classroom learning. We have seen donated collections of classic English literature displayed in Nepali libraries in pride of place, but which have never been opened. Outreach programs need to be instituted to canvass people on the resources they want and to show how a library can be of benefit to them. They must also serve the needs of the pre-literate, offering means by which the non-reader can access information. Our cover picture illustrates how this can be done.

These four areas of concern are shared either in whole or in part by every library and development organisation we canvassed in Nepal at the end of 2009. For successful library deployment all must be addressed in some way. Miss out one component and the best equipped library is likely to run the risk of eventual failure.