

Cutting down on crime in the library

By Roland C. Person and Nelson A. Ferry

An experiment in university library security

Security problems

In the summer of 1987, the dean of the University Libraries at Southern Illinois University at Carbondale (SIUC) wrote to the president of SIUC to describe his concern about security matters in the library. Reported thefts of library materials, mutilation of library materials, and behavioral problems with patrons all appeared to be increasing. Moreover, the reports seemed likely to be only a part of the actual incidents because many are not reported or not discovered until long afterwards. This memo resulted in increasing cooperation among various campus offices, and increased patrols by the university security service, but it was not until the end of 1989 that a specific security response was formally begun.

A trial solution

Money had been a concern from the beginning and the university's fiscal situation had been one of the reasons for the administration not funding a full-time security position for the library. When the dean decided the situation was sufficiently serious to commit library funds to security matters, the decision was made to employ student security personnel full time in the library. One would be on duty at all hours the library was open and a second would come on specifically for the evening hours when fewer library staff were on duty. Both would continuously patrol the eight-story building, often visibly in uniform, sometimes in plain

clothes. The trial period of the spring semester's five and a half months would cost an estimated \$9,600 in wages for the student security force, called Saluki Patrol.

A student security force

When the Saluki Patrol was established in 1959, SIUC's Police Department was the first university police agency in the U.S. to employ students in a law enforcement capacity. The student police officers (Salukis) perform a broad variety of services to the university community. They walk foot patrol, perform traffic and crowd control, conduct building security checks, and operate the telecommunications center. They are unarmed, except for night sticks, but they possess authority to enforce university rules and regulations and to detain suspects at the direction of the university police using walkie-talkie contact. They receive minimal wages, but gain invaluable experience.

The responsibilities of the patrol in the library were broadly in two categories: they were to be alert for property damage, disruptive behavior and noise, smoking and other violations of library rules, and they were to assist with any emergency situations. They could be paged by any staff person in the building, using telephones and pagers. During the initial six weeks of the experiment, all Saluki Patrol officers assigned to the library duty were in full uniform. This gave the staff, particularly those few in the evening hours, a considerable sense of personal security. Publicity in the campus newspaper made their presence well known, with the emphasis on the security benefits to everyone rather than on a "police presence."

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Both categories of duty produced benefits. The plainclothes patrol discovered a number of theft/mutilation violations in progress and were able to initiate arrests, radioing for backup from campus security. During the 18 months prior to the patrol's assignment to the library, there was one criminal arrest, but there were ten arrests during the patrol's 18-month presence in the library. Patrol members also assisted in making patrons and staff visibly aware that security was only a call away and that incidents could be reported with prompt results.

The results of this trial were that statistics on reported incidents supported the conclusion that the program was successful, and library employee morale and informal reaction also strongly supported the presence of the patrol. Both the campus security office and the dean of the libraries agreed that the program was a success, so it was continued through the summer and the following year.

Funding drawbacks

Funding continued to be a problem as both the university's and the library's budgets were being pinched. The two-person patrol cost close to \$20,000 for 12 months so in 1990/91 the library moved to just one Patrol member throughout the hours the library was open. The basic salary costs were also considerably increased at this time by changes in the minimum wage law. These problems grew to such an extent that the library administration was forced to reevaluate the program at the end of fiscal 1991. Again, there were appeals for funding to the university administration, even to the campus security office. These failed and, despite continued staff support for the program, the library was forced to discontinue the patrol in the summer of 1991.

Success amidst failure

In spite of a variety of problems—from patrol boredom to staff concerns about not seeing the patrol for hours at a time (perhaps when they were not in uniform)—there was general agreement both from the library staff and the security personnel that the Saluki Patrol program was a success. Incidents of criminal damage to university property decreased by 50%; disorderly conduct dropped 25%; theft over \$300 declined by 40%; and theft under \$300 dropped 17%. The total number of criminal incidents declined 24%. This decline, plus the 900% increase in criminal arrests, attested both to the

deterrent effect of the patrol's presence and to a much quickened response time for any reported incident. However, funding proved to be the chief sticking point and the library ultimately decided that it could not continue to support the service from the library funds which ought to be going for traditional library materials and services. The reported incidents of theft and mutilation, and the success of the patrol in lessening such incidents, were not sufficient to justify the very visible costs. The staff's increased feeling of security was not sufficient either. When the library's funding of the project ended there was no publicity and the patrol continued random visits, so for some time afterward some believed the patrol was still active in the library, just less visible. This too is proof that the experiment fulfilled much of what was intended even after it officially ended.

The clearly successful experiment with the Saluki Patrol, contrasted both to the number of incidents before the experiment and to the gradually increasing number of incidents following the patrol-induced decline, suggests that an alternative to the status quo is still needed. The library is continuing to work with the campus security office on ways to strengthen security without the luxury of patrol members assigned exclusively to the library. The number of actual arrests for criminal behavior will not equal those of the patrol's time, but better training of library staff, and publicity for users to alert them to security concerns, for their own possessions and for library materials, may lessen the need for such arrests. ■

Letters

Readers are pleased

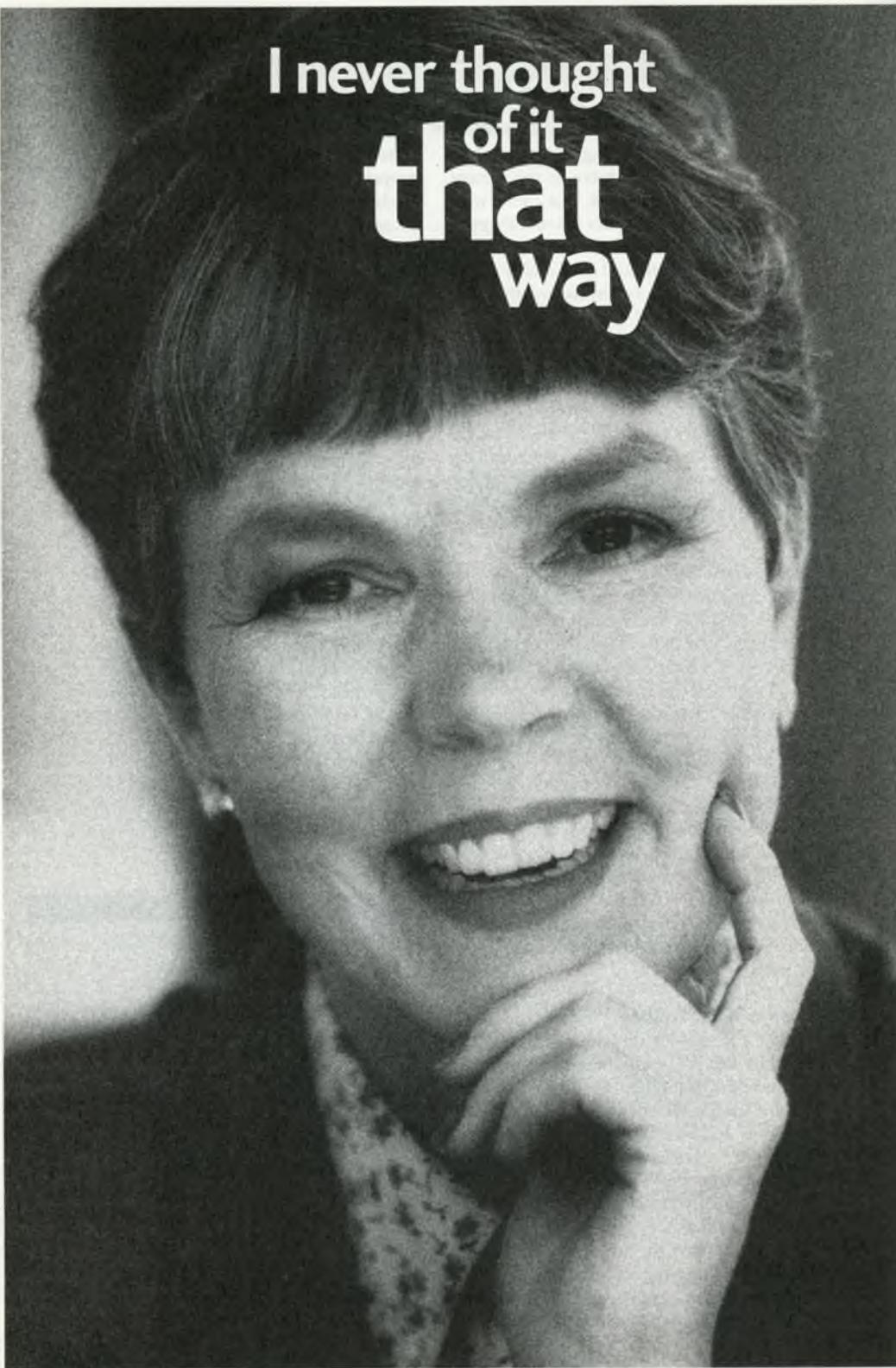
To the Editor:

I must compliment you on a well-done job with your magazine. I am a library student who hopes to become a professional librarian. Keep up the good work and I just love the articles on Internet.—*Cynthia M. Sankey, Alabama State University*

To the Editor:

Just wanted to let you know that I have found the June 1994 issue of *C&RL News* one of the best, most informative issues ever. Keep up the excellent work.—*Drew Racine, University of Texas, Austin*

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