

Library stays afloat thanks to Shipman's work

■ George Shipman contributed to the successful Knight Library fund-raiser and helped advance library technology

By Joel Kuhnau
for the Emerald

Despite receiving notice of a possible termination in 1992, University Librarian George Shipman continued working for eight years — right up until June 30, 2000.

Then he retired.

While Shipman wasn't actually fired in 1992, he along with 16 other library staff members received one-year notices that their contracts might not be renewed because of budget cuts.

"Myles Brand [then University President] thought that if Measure 5 was really going to hit as hard as predicted, we needed to take prudent steps," Shipman recalled.

He disagreed with the strategy, but said that by taking such drastic measures the administration felt "maybe people will begin to realize this is real."

"It didn't work out," Shipman added. In fact no one was laid off,

but according to Shipman the uncertainty over potential job cuts contributed to a loss of 48 percent of library faculty in 18 months.

Shipman hadn't wanted to retire. He's a man who readily admits, "I love my work." But after being diagnosed with a rare vascular disease, he said his doctor told him "you're through," and he decided to follow his doctor's advice.

Shipman, 61, became University Librarian in 1980, having previously served as an Associate Library Director at the University of Tennessee. During his twenty years on the job, he oversaw a library collection that has grown from about 1.5 million volumes in 1980, to more than 2.3 million today.

Library funding was an issue right from the beginning.

"Our problem is we are always running a debt," he said.

Budgetary issues are no longer

Shipman's domain. Deborah Carver, an associate University librarian, was named interim library head following Shipman's departure two and half months ago.

When Shipman first started 20 years ago, the University library didn't do any fundraising. Shipman created a development office so that the library could raise money as other departments do. That money helps fill in holes in the budget, funding everything from new books to student internships.

Shipman said that in talking to donors, including Nike founder Phil Knight, he emphasized that a donation to the library was a way "to make an impression on the entire University community."

Several large donations in the late 1980s helped the University push forward with a 140,000 square foot expansion of the library.

Persuading donors hasn't seemed to be a problem, with the development program having raised about \$30 million to date.

"My view is that everyone who

graduates is an alum of the library," Shipman said.

"I think he was pretty far ahead of the curve in making development a priority," said Lisa Manotti, the library's Director of Development.

She added that libraries are increasingly catching on to the idea that they need to fundraise.

While bricks-and-mortar improvements have been highly visible, so have the changes in library technology during Shipman's tenure. He remembers the quizzical looks the first computer monitors got from students and faculty when they were introduced in the early 1980s as a means of accessing the library catalog. Within no time, puzzled stares turned into enthusiastic reactions, and as Shipman said of the technology bandwagon, "they jumped on to it, and we never turned them off."

Dennis Hyatt, Law Library Director, credits Shipman with having "the vision to see the power the computer was going to have," and foreseeing possibilities before the

technology was there with systems like Janus and Orbis.

The Janus system catalogs the library's collections on-line, while Orbis created a consortium of libraries in Oregon and Washington that share materials. Shipman played a leading role in establishing this system, which provides access to more than eight million books.

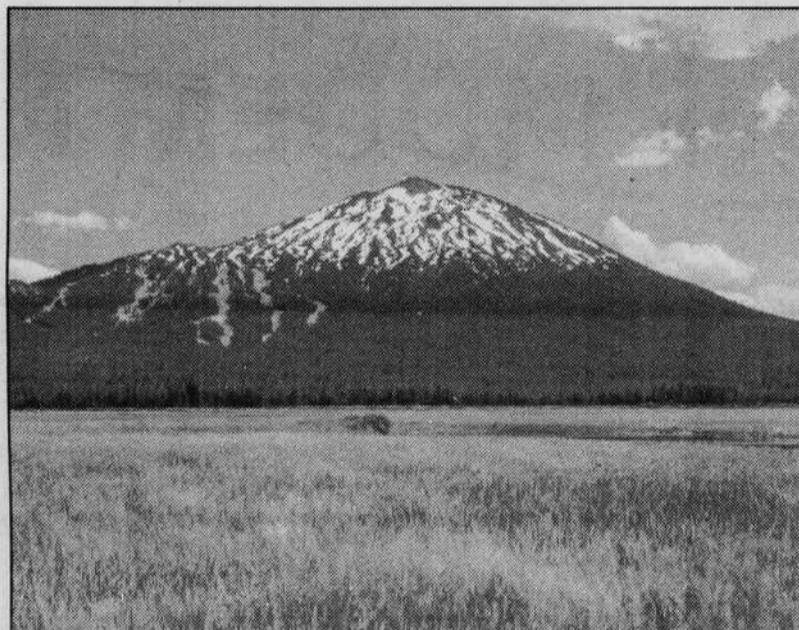
Shipman said the library has tried to have "as many networks as possible, and as many terminals as possible, so all students could have access."

Now that he has retired, the termination notice that hung in a frame on his office wall since 1992 has come down. Shipman said he will miss library work, what he described as helping students and faculty "engage in acts of exploration."

Shipman said he is also grateful for his time at the University.

"I'm pleased that the University of Oregon honored me by letting me be University librarian for 20 years," he said.

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