

# Celebrating libraries (and humor) every day

By Susan Vazakas

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## *A little humor makes librarians more approachable*

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**L**ibrary patrons, particularly those with all-consuming academic workloads, appreciate a little humor in the library. A university science and engineering library is the den of the very serious. They enter, grim-faced, bearing immense organic chemistry tomes (sold by weight at the bookstore), and cardboard boxes filled with circuit boards or plastic models of DNA. They travel from dorm room to class to lab and back again in an unending cycle; their clones become contaminated; their computer programs crash; their proteins denature as soon as they turn their backs.

The people who come to use our Science/Engineering Library have the weight of the world on their shoulders, and perhaps it is the constant high-intensity level of their existence that makes them so deeply appreciate a well-chosen cartoon or unusual sight when they come to study.

### **Library decor makes patrons smile**

Our bulletin board always has a selection of cartoons that poke fun at science and technology: air fares that change with continental drift; the poor soul who has taken to applying Heisenberg's uncertainty principle to *everything*; a crowd of scientists dropping everything and running out the door toward an approaching ice cream truck.

My office door sports a small but choice collection of library cartoons, including the classic complaint by a couple that they have nothing in common because one searches by author and the other by title. Another shows a

pristine room filled with neat rows of computer terminals; a forlorn-looking fellow stands in the middle, spraying from a large can labelled "Eau de Library—Essence of Card Catalog Drawer."

In my office is a giant framed poster of the "periodic table of desserts," complete with Latin names and the average number of calories per dessert. This is flanked by a painting of an alchemist in an atmospheric candle-lit room, and an ALA poster featuring the crew of the U.S.S. Enterprise. My window sill is populated by a herd of plastic dinosaurs of various colors and sizes, all creeping, flying, and lumbering toward an unknown destination.

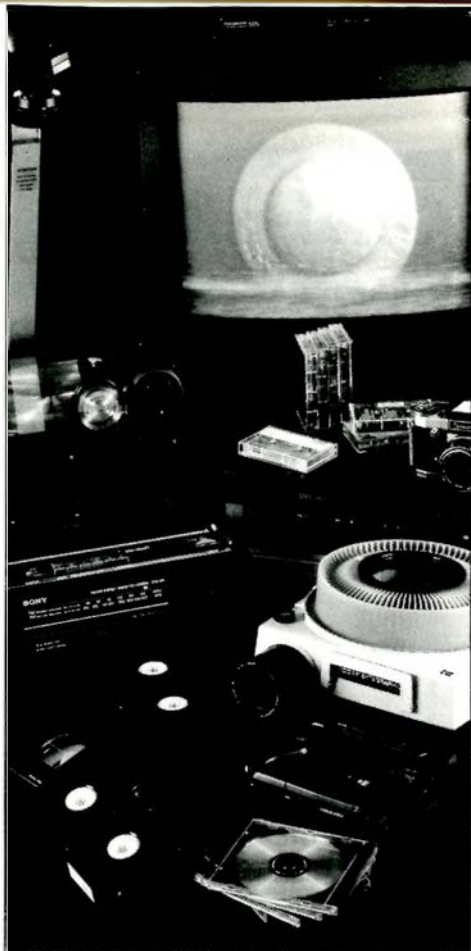
### **Dinosaur feet**

During final exam week, I wear a pair of woolly dinosaur feet colored a mottled green with large yellow claws. These are a favorite of my co-workers, and patrons bestow delighted smiles as I walk past, even when they are in the throes of designing airfoils or studying enzyme kinetics.

Library patrons have made special trips to my office or the circulation desk to ask how they can get their own copies of the posters. They laugh out loud at the cartoons on the bulletin board, and people passing outside my office stop and say "Ooh, look at the dinosaurs!" (I also use dinosaur models as prizes during my bibliographic instruction session on *Chemical Abstracts*; they work wonders to loosen up the crowd.)

An occasional charge in the library literature has been that we take ourselves too seriously. It is very admirable that we take our *jobs* seriously; however, when we take ourselves lightly, the patrons enjoy it, and we become more approachable. And this makes us better able to do our jobs. ■

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