

Unpaid Fines and Fees for Sunnyvale Public Library Accounts – The *San Jose Mercury News* recently reported that San Jose Public Library patrons have \$6.8 million dollars in unpaid fines and fees on their accounts. Many of these fees are likely from materials that have not been returned. San Jose Library Director, Jill Bourne, has proposed an overdue fine amnesty period to encourage the return of valuable library materials and to welcome cardholders, including children and teens, back to the library so they can benefit from the many resources a public library provides.

The Sunnyvale Public Library circulates 2.5 million items per year and currently has 118,117 registered card holders. A total of 29,916 active Sunnyvale Library card holders currently have \$620,303 in unpaid fines and fees on their accounts. Of this amount, there is \$111,000 in fines attached to library cards registered to minors. The Library blocks patron accounts with fines over \$20 from borrowing materials. Seventy-eight percent, or 23,367 card holders, owe less than \$20 on their accounts. The amount due in fines and fees is in constant flux as patrons respond to the Library's attempts to recover overdue materials and unpaid fines.

The majority of Sunnyvale's collections may be borrowed for a period of three weeks. Eligible items can be renewed up to three times, extending the checkout period to as long as 12 weeks. Sunnyvale patrons are notified by phone and email when materials are past due and they are eventually sent a replacement bill if the materials are not returned. When a billed item is returned, the billed amount is replaced by a \$10 overdue fine in the patron record. If a patron indicates they are willing to pay, but can't due to financial hardship, the Library will continue to allow a patron to borrow one item at a time while payments are made to bring the account down to a zero balance. If a patron does not return their past due materials after receiving the replacement bill, the account may be referred to a collection agency.

In September 2008, the Library began using a collection agency that specializes in library accounts, Unique Management. Since then 5,387 patrons owing \$721,211 in billed materials have been submitted to Unique Management for collection purposes. As of January 31, \$219,397 has been collected and materials valued at \$92,566 have been recovered. The Library's return on investment for this service is 7:1. From September 2008 to the present, \$1,877,825 in fines and fees have been collected due to the Library's combined use of notifications, billings and collection agency referrals. Link to the *San Jose Mercury News* article: http://www.mercurynews.com/bay-area-news/ci_29603104/san-jose-library-fine-amnesty-considered .