**Project Description**

**A Documentary Film**

**“Books on the Backroads: Stories of New Mexico’s Rural Libraries” (working title)**

“The only thing that you absolutely have to know is the location of the library.”

Albert Einstein was surely confident about the locations of many great libraries--- but so too are the people who live in the rural villages of El Rito, Dixon, Abiquiu, Vallecitos, and 47 other small communities across New Mexico. They know exactly where their libraries are, and that they are essential to the educational and social fabric of their communities.

In New Mexico and across the country, rural libraries mean books, but so much more. They offer free internet access in rural areas that have no service. They provide GED, STEM, coding, tutoring and after school programs. Rural libraries host community events and meetings, help folks with computer access for jobs, health insurance, voter registration and citizenship applications, and to arrange medical appointments during the pandemic. They have seed banks, genealogical records, and they even sponsor archeological digs. Einstein was right.

**A few libraries**

The paved road ends just past the village of Vallecitos, where livelihoods logging the surrounding forest ended many years ago. The 2020 census counted 238 people living in and around this community, nestled in a picturesque cottonwood glen, but whose eroding adobe walls mirror the economic hardship. In Vallecitos, the Library is in the old general store, a rambling adobe full of books, DVDs, and computer terminals, lovingly restored by the community.

There is a telephone on a bench under the front portal, a land line, available to all in this community with poor to no cellular service. During the pandemic, the library phone was essential equipment, and the librarian and volunteers provided transportation to clinics, hospitals, and shopping, and tutoring for kids whose schools, 20 miles away over mountain roads, were closed.

This year, the Embudo Valley Library in Dixon is celebrating 30 years of civic pride and service. That’s because it’s one of the best rural libraries in the country. In 2012, this community-built library was named one of America’s Star Libraries, and in May 2015 it won the National Medal for Museum and Library Service.

The people from Dixon, the Embudo Valley, the high mountain villages of Peñasco, Vadito, Chamisal, Trampas, and the Picuris Pueblo are farmers, artists, and craftsmen, and they helped to build this 3000 square foot library, a neighboring community center, an orchard, park, and the Dixon Cooperative Market grocery store, whose rent helps support the library.

Almost half of New Mexico’s rural libraries subsist on less than $50,000 a year, some less than $10,000. Most depend on volunteers. The Embudo Valley Library has over 60.

The Pueblo of Abiquiu sits on a mesa overlooking the Rio Chama, red rock canyons, and the Sangre de Christo mountains. El Pueblo de Abiquiu Library and Cultural Center is in a 200 year old adobe house directly across the plaza from the church of Saint Thomas The Apostle. It used to be the Librarian’s family home, and she can still look out her former kitchen window.

The people who formed the Pueblo of Abiquiu in 1742 were not willing settlers, but Native Americans who had been captured and enslaved/indentured by both the Spanish and enemy tribes. They were called Genizaros, and many were given land grants in exchange for helping to defend the Abiquiu frontier against raids by Navajo, Ute, Apache and Comanche.

More than just books, the Library is now a center for Genizaro documents and genealogical research, helping to sponsor ancestral DNA testing for families throughout the community, and in a joint venture--- The Berkeley-Abiquiu Collaborative Archaeology project--- supporting fieldwork that explores historic acequia irrigation technology.

The folks in Vallecitos, Dixon, and Abiquiu are justly proud of their libraries, but Magdaleños will extol their library in the old Santa Fe rail depot on the Plains of San Augustine, as will residents of Columbus, whose library was an old saloon that now serves books to people on both sides of the border.

Every one of New Mexico’s 51 rural libraries has good stories to tell, but we hope to choose 5 or 6 of the best, across the state, and tell them in an hour long documentary film. We are Mary Lance and Ben Daitz, veteran, multi-award winning filmmakers.

**Distribution**

We would hope that our documentary reaches a broad audience in New Mexico and nationally. NM PBS has already expressed interest in the film, as they have aired many of our documentaries in the past (see below)-- and we will offer it to them at no charge. We will also offer free streaming and/or DVDs to all NM libraries.

Tijeras Films, wwwtijerasfilms.org, is a 501c3, non-profit.

**Bios**

Mary Lance has over forty years’ experience in documentary production. Her independent documentaries include CROWVILLE (2019), BLUE ALCHEMY: STORIES OF INDIGO (2011), AGNES MARTIN: WITH MY BACK TO THE WORLD (2002), DIEGO RIVERA: I PAINT WHAT I SEE (1989), and ARTISTS AT WORK: A FILM ON THE NEW DEAL ART PROJECTS. (1981). Her work been distributed widely in the USA and abroad at institutions including Film Forum, Tate Modern, the Guggenheim Museum, and the Metropolitan Museum of Art and broadcast on public television and Sundance Channel. She has received funding from the National Endowment for the Arts, the National Endowment for the Humanities, and foundations. www.newdealfilms.com

Ben Daitz is Professor of Medicine at the UNMSOM, a writer and documentary filmmaker. His many films have been screened and honored by PBS, American Public Television, and film festivals. Recent documentaries include: THE SUN NEVER SETS, about Española New Mexico’s Rio Grande Sun, one of the best small-town newspapers in the country, screened at multiple festivals and The Newseum in Washington, D.C.; THE MEDICINE IN MARIJUANA, a scientific look at the plant and people who use it, co-produced with Ned Judge, and aired on NM PBS; and the latest, PROJECT ECHO: A DEMOCRACY OF KNOWLEDGE, about an extraordinary world health project, aired on NM PBS and PBS affiliates around the country. Ben’s novel, Delivery, was named to the Best of the Southwest. He has been a contributing writer for the New York Times, the Atlantic, Undark, and Eclectica.