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Spokane Moms campaign is grass-roots success story

South Hill women raise awareness, help to restore library funding

[Dan Hansen](#)
Staff writer
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Spokane Public Schools is restoring some of the funding cut from elementary libraries last year, thanks largely to the lobbying efforts of three women who have become heroes among librarians nationwide.



Susan McBurney, from left, Denette Hill and Lisa Layera Brunkan lobbied to restore librarian jobs in Spokane Public Schools. The Spokesman-Review (BRIAN PLONKA The Spokesman-Review)

"They call us the Spokane Moms, which I think is so funny," said Lisa Layera Brunkan.

The school district last year cut \$350,000 in library money, part of \$10.8 million in budget cuts. That meant 10 librarians were reduced to part-time hours.

Initially upset about the loss at Roosevelt Elementary, where their children attend, the three began working to draw attention to the cuts across the district. They learned that several cash-strapped Western Washington districts were cutting back on librarians, too, and their effort spread.

Advertisement Brunkan, Denette Hill and Susan McBurney started an online petition that eventually netted 6,000 signatures. They spoke to state committees and sold T-shirts.

Soon, they were hearing from other states where libraries are at risk, and they became the subject of a Los Angeles Times story.

The Washington Legislature in March included \$4 million for school libraries in the state budget. Spokane's share amounts to \$135,000, to which the school administrators want to add \$65,000, despite having to make cuts elsewhere. And the state's superintendent of public instruction recently recommended that the state pay for one school librarian for every 500 students – an increase of about 50 percent more librarians.

Brunkan praised Spokane schools Superintendent Nancy Stowell and local legislators for finding money. But among librarians, the Spokane Moms are the "true heroes," as they were called in a recent edition of the School Library Journal.

Using the Spokane women as a model, the American Association of School Librarians is creating a "tool kit" for library advocates.

And when someone from the American Library Association learned Brunkan was accompanying her husband on a business trip to Washington, D.C., last month, the organization arranged a meeting in the White House. While Brunkan was talking libraries with a member of Laura Bush's staff, her two children were invited to peruse the children's books in the first lady's personal collection.

Next up: a trip this month to Anaheim, Calif., where the Spokane Moms will give a talk on grass-roots advocacy and receive the American Association of School Librarians' Crystal Apple award.

The first lady, a former librarian, was the most recent recipient.

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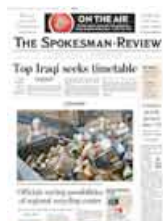
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