



AMIA the association of moving image archivists

1999 Dan & Kathy Leab Award Winner: Susan Wester

Tribute by Martha Yee

AMIA awards the Dan and Katy Leab Award each year to an "unsung hero" in moving image archiving, and there is no question that Susan Wester is an unsung hero at the UCLA Film and Television Archive. Susan has made a major contribution to the creation of our 136,000 title catalog. I estimate that she did the initial inputting of fully half of those titles. Among Susan's many assets is a generous spirit, so I am sure she won't mind sharing some of the credit for this catalog with the people who preceded her in her job, and who input the other half of the records; we're very proud that the first person to fill Susan's position, Linda Tadic, is now the current AMIA president! Linda input a third of the database in the time she worked for us.

Not only is Susan responsible for having input half the database, but the inputting has become increasingly difficult over time, a challenge that Susan never failed to rise to. Over time, the archivists who supply the information that Susan inputs have supplied us with more and more information about each title, and Susan has never balked at learning more of the complexities of the MARC format in order to be able to input this more and more complex information. Thus, the records she inputs are considerably longer and more time-consuming to input than they used to be. Her intellectual curiosity and desire to learn make her a great asset to our staff.

She eagerly volunteers to branch out and do much more than is included in her official job description. Over the course of time, she has served as an assistant to our curator, Eddie Richmond, on special projects, a collection development person for the reference book collection that supports the cataloging and curatorial work at the Hollywood location of the Archive, and a newsreel cataloger. In her latter capacity, she has input a substantial amount of information from the Hearst newsreel paper documentation that we received along with the newsreel films. She has also input a substantial amount of information to enhance our television records, using information provided by our television archivist, Dan Einstein.

In the last year, we have built up a backlog of about 24,000 titles while waiting for the completion of new software for our catalog; Susan, on her own initiative, planned and built a backlog database to help the archivists cope with this frustrating situation. This is typical of her initiative, cleverness, and willingness to help out without being asked. In addition to all of her other fine qualities, she is good company, well-read and well-spoken, easy to work with, and just a general all-round unsung hero.