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Libraries in the Community: Changing Opportunities

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Libraries in the Community

For a small state, Maine is blessed with a multiplicity of libraries—local public libraries in many communities; college and university libraries; specialty libraries; school libraries; special collections libraries; and the state library. Some articles in this section discuss these types of libraries, while others focus on the role of libraries in communities and provide examples of the programs and services today's libraries offer. Stephanie Zurinski, Valerie Osborne, Mamie Anthoine-Ney and Janet McKenney set the stage in their overview about the changing opportunities of libraries in communities. They discuss libraries as “third places,” spots that serve as community centers for all ages; the role of libraries in civic engagement; and libraries as education places, business incubators, and creation and performance spaces. They consider the “new realities” of libraries in the digital age, and discuss challenges libraries face. Several articles focus on particular types of libraries: health science libraries (Susan Bloomfield, Deborah Clark, Dina McKelvy and Lucinda White); the Maine State Library and its unique role in the state (Linda Lord); and the State Law and Legislative Reference Library (John Barden). Library programs and services to specific populations are presented by Steve Podgajny (the immigrant community); Deanna Gouzie (young children and families in the “Family Place” library program); Cynthia Jennings (homeschoolers); Andrew M. Mead (on “lawyers in libraries” and citizens seeking legal assistance); and Steve Norman (summer visitors to libraries). Steve Podgajny describes Portland's new bookmobile and the library's new model of “portable libraries.” Finally, Stephen Bromage discusses the important role libraries are playing through collaboration with the Maine Historical Society and local historical societies in documenting local history and making it accessible online. 🐉

Libraries in the Community: *Changing Opportunities*

By Stephanie Zurinski, Valerie Osborne,
Mamie Anthoine-Ney and Janet McKenney

INTRODUCTION

When libraries first began, books were scarce and expensive. Libraries were archives for information with books chained to tables. With the arrival of the printing press in the mid-15th century, books and information ceased being scarce, and information technology began a journey that would become a dizzying ascendance. Between the advent of the radio early in the 20th century and the arrival of the web browser in the early 1990s, less than 100 years passed. The pace quickened, and only eight years passed between the first primitive Internet search engine, Archie (1990), and the arrival of the now omnipresent Google (1998). Public libraries began offering Internet access in Maine in 1996 with 56K connections and one computer. Now public libraries in Maine have a minimum of 10 mbps connections with desktops, laptops, and videoconferencing units. Public expectations are also evolving at a rapid pace, and libraries and librarians must adapt to this fast rate of change.

Libraries have long been considered a symbol of “Culture.” In this view, libraries exist “for the diffusion of knowledge and to promote serious purposes of culture and study” (McCrossen 2006: 176). Librarians saw their role as champions of higher culture, helping the public choose the correct books for their edification. Children’s programming started in the 1890s to combat the assumption that people weren’t reading enough. Librarians thought if they could get children to love reading, then they would become lifelong readers and learners.

By the late 19th century, the role of the library as an arbiter of Culture began to change as a flourishing market for mass leisure and cultural pursuits began to grow. Librarians responded to changing societal norms by offering popular fiction, newspapers, and periodicals in addition to literature. In the first half of the 20th century, libraries also began offering concerts, movies, and exhibitions to directly compete with the “cheap amusements” of the time.

Libraries today continue to serve the ideals of free and open access to ideas and information and intellectual freedom. Above all, libraries continue to be attuned to meeting the needs of their communities. In the 21st century, libraries are encouraged to be the center of community life, going beyond traditional services, to be community builders and places where people get involved. R. David Lankes says in *Expect More: Demanding Better Libraries for Today’s World* (2012) that bad libraries build collections, good libraries build services, and great libraries build communities. Libraries aren’t just about the books. Libraries are about programs and service and connecting people.

LIBRARIES AS THIRD PLACES

Sociologist Ray Oldenburg, in his book *The Great, Good Place* (1999), introduces the concept of the “third place”—the place, besides home and work, where people go to spend time. Oldenburg (1999) talks about the importance of these public spaces, which can serve as centers for civic engagement. According to Oldenburg, true third places are free or inexpensive; have food and drink available; are readily accessible by many people; have repeat visitors (regulars); are welcoming and comfortable; and let you meet old friends or make new ones.

That sounds a lot like a public library. Libraries, because they are open to all people, are perfect third places. They are shared social spaces that, through programs and services, allow people to engage with information and with each other. Libraries play a vital role in establishing connections between people and in building community, which results in mutual support and cooperation while reducing the intolerance that can grow from isolation. Public libraries also contribute to communities by offering educational and recreational

European Libraries Lead the Way

European libraries have been leading the way in the evolutionary process libraries are undergoing. The Amsterdam Central Library has transformed itself from a lending library to an adventure library. It is located at the highest point in the city so people often visit for the view. The children's area has small storytelling areas along with comfortable seating for sharing stories. The craft room is always open and set up so that children can draw, color, and paste. A wireless network supports the 600 computers and 50 workplaces that have multimedia capability. The library has a profit-sharing arrangement with the two restaurants located inside. A radio station broadcasts in the afternoon and evening and invites people to have their say about current issues. There are music and meeting rooms along with a theater.

Sello Library in Finland aims to be a cultural department store—a place where everything happens. Their learning center supports all ages and many ways of learning, including computer skills for seniors. The library serves as a forum for municipal activities and cultural events. Through partnerships with publishers and bookstores, the library offers writing workshops. The music studio has professional level equipment for producing and mixing music. The studio and music workshops are routinely booked six months in advance.

programming, free Internet access, access to computers and other technologies, and by building connections between individuals, groups and agencies.

The concept of libraries as a meeting place isn't new. Small town libraries have always been places where people gather to visit. Often in small towns, the library is the only spot that offers a welcoming environment where you can sit awhile or talk with the librarian over the circulation desk. Some libraries host weekly teas or other informal social events that bring community members to the library for food and conversation. In addition to book clubs, many small-town libraries offer space for knitting groups or other craft activities. Many libraries have meeting rooms that are available to the public for a fee and sometimes free. Larger libraries may have study rooms or small meeting rooms that can be reserved.

In the United States, libraries of all sizes are increasingly setting aside café spaces, as the Portland

Public Library has, or art galleries, like the Topsham Public Library, that facilitate coming together and conversations. Traditional library activities such as classes and events are also evolving and new ways to engage the community are beginning to emerge.

Libraries are community centers that cut across all ages. While a town or city may have its senior center, its teen center, and its schools, these are designed to provide services and programming for specific ages. Libraries are the only common places that serve the population from cradle to grave. Small-town libraries often think of themselves as the living rooms of their communities. That's what a third place is all about.

CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

Libraries play a vital role in civic engagement in their communities. Civic engagement is about strengthening local democracy, building robust communities, and empowering people to become involved in the life of their communities in meaningful, creative, and sustained ways. Civic engagement is crucial to a healthy democracy.

Libraries are perfectly positioned to nurture these democratic practices. They are open to all; contain books and other materials that provide people with a common experience and language; and frequently attract people who are thinking about their goals, about what they, their communities, state and country might become. Libraries, which are often seen as products of democracy, can also be seen as engines of democracy, as places where people go to engage with one another and to begin making a difference.

Today libraries are more involved than ever, convening community conversations, building civic literacy, educating a new generation of citizens, and engaging citizens in issues of common concern. Bangor Public Library hosts the Foreign Policy Forum several times each year. The focus is on global issues, the speakers internationally known, and the topics engaging. Between 50 and 60 people attend each event. A recent program was "Revisiting Iraq: A Tutorial for the Arab Spring" featuring Steve Kenney, vice president for finance of the American University of Beirut.

The public libraries in Blue Hill, Southwest Harbor, Castine, Ellsworth, Rockland, and Cushing

are all offering programs in 2013 that support the world-famous Camden Conference, which epitomizes civic engagement. In support of the conference, libraries throughout the region add the numerous books from the reading list to their collections. The Camden Conference was founded in 1987 as a nonprofit, nonpartisan educational organization whose mission is to foster informed discourse on world issues.

All over Maine, libraries are partnering with the Maine Humanities Council to bring programming that inspires community discourse. During the election season libraries host “Meet the Candidate Nights” to keep the citizens informed and the candidates aware of community needs. The Food for Fines Program, the inspiration of the Blue Hill Public Library, promoted statewide by the Maine State Library, brought thousands of pounds of food to food pantries across the state. The Food for Fines program was a perfect way to get hundreds of people engaged in a very real problem—feeding the poor, ensuring that everyone has enough to eat.

Libraries are often the first connection that immigrants make with their new communities. This was true in the early days of American libraries and is still true today. Libraries bring people together in assemblies. Lewiston Public Library’s “Great Falls Forum,” presents opportunities for residents to discuss local issues including the experience of the Somali community as it settles in the Lewiston/Auburn area. The Portland Public Library offers a program called the Multilingual Leadership Corps Program for the library’s English-language learning (EEL) teens. The program provides mentoring, school skills support, and community engagement while giving them means to embrace and overcome the challenges of mastering a new language.

The mission of any public library might very easily be paraphrased in this way—*Our library’s mission is to enrich the lives of our community members with free access to programs, materials and services that empower, educate, and inspire.* That also translates to civic engagement. Library programs can and do make a difference in focusing on the big topics facing society. Libraries are the only practical public institution that people have a chance to experience daily. Libraries are places where people can meet others with views

different from their own, a place where others can come together and share their insights in a safe place.

LIBRARIES AS EDUCATION PLACES

Lifelong learning has long been a mission of libraries. Today’s libraries have offerings and programs for people of all ages.

Children’s story times expose children and their parents to the rhythms of language through songs, rhymes, and books. Craft and other activities in story times teach other skills such as dexterity or getting along with others. In addition to these kinds of activities, across Maine, there are 12 libraries designated as Family Place Libraries™ (see Gouzie, this issue), part of a national network whose mission is to help libraries become community hubs for healthy child and family development. Libraries in the program redesign their space to be welcoming and appropriate for families with young children. In addition, libraries connect parents with resources, programs and services in the



A young patron at the Bangor Public Library.

community to help families give children the critical early literacy support needed to ensure that children enter school ready to learn.

It isn't just very young children who benefit from libraries as learning spaces. Many libraries sponsor homework help sessions after school where volunteers help children and young adults with their assignments. Reader dogs are popular across the country, where children read to trained therapy dogs. "This program takes the benefits associated with animal interaction and uses them to encourage and motivate children to improve their reading skills. Although the specific details vary among individual programs, they are designed to have children read to trained dogs, thus taking advantage of the non-judgmental and stress reducing effects of a dog during reading programs for children" (Lenihan et al. 2012).

Libraries participate in Money Smart Week®, a public awareness campaign created by the Federal Reserve Bank of Chicago, to help consumers of all ages to better manage their personal finances. During one week in late April, public libraries in Maine and across the U.S. offer seminars on all aspects of personal finance from budgeting to home buying to investments. In Maine, the Curtis Memorial Library and Camden Public Library received Smart investing@your library® grants from the Financial Industry Regulatory Authority (FINRA) to further financial literacy.

Many libraries offer formal classes on everything from resume writing to Facebook for seniors. All public libraries in Maine have access to an online resource of magazines and books called MARVEL!. LearningExpress Library, an online learning tool, is one of the free resources that Maine citizens can use in their public library or at home with a computer and Internet connection. Courses, practice tests, and skills-building courses are offered, along with downloadable e-books. Topics include resume writing, test preparation (for example, GED, SAT, GRE), software tutorials, and more.

Eleven libraries across Maine received videoconferencing equipment as part of the federal Broadband Technology Opportunity Program (BTOP) grant. This equipment allows these libraries to serve as regional training and broadcasting hubs for a host of programs (McKenney, this issue). The IRS has used these centers to train practitioners across the state. Statewide, the

Lawyers in Libraries project is bringing legal help to low-income people through videoconferencing (Mead, this issue). The Cherryfield Public Library is using its videoconferencing equipment to host remote broadcasts of programs from NASA and the Smithsonian. The kickoff event connected local seventh and eighth graders for a lecture on the Milestones of Flight.

Maine-based Cornerstones of Science, a nonprofit group dedicated to increasing science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) literacy, partners with libraries to bring science programs to all ages. Recently, 18 libraries received telescopes from Cornerstones of Science and access to local astronomy clubs to help with star parties. The telescopes circulate to patrons along with a star chart so families can stargaze at home. Cornerstones of Science also supplies "science trunks" to libraries that are full of books and activities on a variety of subjects. One of the more popular trunks is the crime-scene investigation trunk, which lets librarians host a crime-solving program. Lewiston Public Library partnered with the local police department to host this program in their community.

LIBRARIES AS BUSINESS INCUBATORS

Business incubators have been around since the late 1950s and have experienced steady growth in numbers. The most common type of business incubator offers subsidized rent and business services to fledgling businesses along with small business classes. Phil Shapiro argues that in the information age public libraries are "ideally situated to assume the role of business incubator" (2010: 1). Libraries already bring people together to learn and share ideas. Libraries also connect people within communities with services and resources. It is not much of a leap for libraries to work at connecting people with ideas and people with the skills and resources to bring those ideas into reality. As Shapiro (2010: 2) concludes, "Libraries can be places that statically house ideas or places where ideas are put into action."

Currently, libraries offering business services do so in varying degrees. Many offer the traditional business books, databases, and small business classes. Some make office equipment such as computers, phones, fax machines, printers, and copiers available, often

charging only minimal amounts to defray the cost of paper and toner or printer cartridges.

LIBRARIES AS PERFORMANCE AND CREATION PLACES

Libraries are places that nurture creativity and provide space for performance and exhibitions. With Maine's rich literary environment, there isn't a Maine public library that hasn't held an author-reading/book-signing program. These programs allow Maine citizens to meet and talk with authors about their works and their craft. Libraries offer poetry slams, theatrical programs, local art exhibits, and musical events. Several Maine libraries have started ukulele clubs where people come together to learn to play and make music. Libraries also sponsor musical events either in their facility or at local venues. The Topsham Public Library runs a series of concerts each March in its community room. The Bangor Public Library sponsors concerts on its grounds during the summer. The Thomaston Public Library holds monthly contra and square dancing events. Libraries sponsor Lego clubs where children and adults build and display their creations. Children get so wrapped up in their creations that they create back stories, thus increasing their literacy skills along with their engineering skills.

"Creation library" is a relatively new concept that is gaining traction among librarians. The idea is for libraries to facilitate the creative process through dedicated spaces and equipment. Libraries aren't just places to find out about what you want to do; they are places to actually do. As Visser describes in this issue, "makerspaces" in libraries are workshops or studios that provide access to computer controlled tools, 3D printers, and other technical resources. Users have the opportunity "to explore their interests, use new tools, and develop creative, often collaborative, projects" (Visser, this issue: 111). The price of a 3D printer is dropping into the range that libraries can afford. Skidompha Public Library in Damariscotta has one. Pam Gormley, the director, says that right now it's used mainly for printing missing Lego pieces, but the potential uses for that printer include entrepreneurs prototyping new products.

What Libraries in Some Other States Are Doing for Business

The Dallas Public Library central facility has one floor dedicated to business and technology. Half of the floor space on that floor contains desks and is open to local start-ups to set up shop. The James J. Hill Reference Library in St. Paul, MN, hosts Studio/E (Frisch 2012) where local leaders and entrepreneurs meet to develop ideas and get support. By including people from all walks of life, members are able to get a fresh perspective on their businesses. Instead of just talking to other retailers, a member might talk with someone from health care or law and get a totally different view. The cohort meets quarterly to share challenges, learn from each other and learn different approaches to generating ideas. Studio/E is built on Babson College's entrepreneurship program and instructors from the college visit to stimulate discussion. Currently, this program is not open to everyone. There is an application process and a membership fee to join.

Some libraries are filming programs such as author events and putting the event on YouTube or making it available as a podcast as a way to extend the reach of their programming. It is another way to take what is happening in the community and showcase it to the world. The Auburn Public Library has recently set up a media lab where people can create movies. The lab contains scanners, computers, cameras, and a green screen. They even hold classes so patrons can learn how to create a movie. Other libraries offer music practice rooms, recording studios, and art rooms.

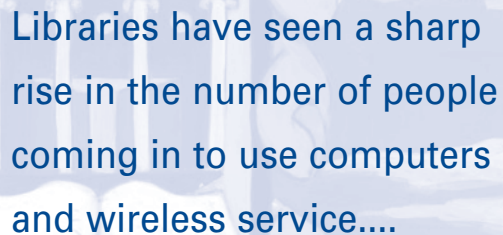
One of the easiest ways a library can become a creation library is to digitize the community's history. Simply scanning an historic photograph and posting it on the library's web site or blog is an easy step that libraries of all sizes can take to share their communities with the world. Libraries can partner with their local historical society to make such a project happen (see Bromage, this issue).

NEW REALITIES

Since the advent of the digital age, people have predicted the demise of libraries as physical locations. Libraries took those predictions seriously and began developing a "virtual" presence. Libraries have had web

sites since the Internet took off in the mid-1990s. These early web pages were mostly informational, showcasing open hours, programs, policies, contact information, and links to the online catalog and databases. Today, libraries have Facebook pages, Twitter feeds and YouTube channels, all in the effort to meet the people in their communities where they are. These social networking sites also allow the library to offer the community's activities to a much broader audience; so libraries that digitize local history or record and broadcast community events are putting their towns on the digital map.

Libraries offer books, music, and movies as download services, and databases are accessible from home and not just in the library. In Michigan, the Ann Arbor Library District offers online contests where participants earn badges similar to Foursquare. All these virtual activities are designed to meet the new ways that people want to interact with information.



Libraries have seen a sharp rise in the number of people coming in to use computers and wireless service....

While it's true that libraries have embraced the virtual side, no discussion would be complete without a mention of the digital divide that still exists in this country. The digital divide is increasingly becoming less about the ability to afford the technology and more about access. People in many rural areas still don't have access to high-speed Internet. A lot of people don't see any reason to be "online." But with more government services going online these people run the risk of being behind.

Libraries in Maine are often the only place in town with high-speed Internet service. And libraries have friendly staff whose job is to help people with information needs. Libraries have seen a sharp rise in the number of people coming in to use computers and wireless service to access government benefits, such as

unemployment or disaster relief, and for help with job hunting. Wireless has actually expanded the library space beyond its walls to porches, lawns, and parking lots. Although a virtual presence is necessary in today's world, a physical presence for libraries is still essential.

The future is bringing changes in how society values information. Accuracy, authenticity, authority, and privacy no longer have the same value. People want to be involved with information, so the popularity of tagging and social networking sites for book lovers, such as Maine-based LibraryThing or Shelfari and GoodReads, will probably continue to grow. Librarians will have to think more about connecting people to information instead of collecting information (Shaffer 2012).

Libraries also need to be positioned and prepared for the developing mobile revolution. In 2009, six percent of users over the age of 16 used a mobile device to connect to library web sites and services. By 2012, that percentage had increased to 13 percent (Rainie, Zickuhr and Duggan 2012). In 2012, 85 percent of Americans owned a cell phone and 45 percent owned smart phones. This number is forecast to grow to nearly 69 percent by 2015 (www.statista.com/statistics/201182/forecast-of-smartphone-users-in-the-us).

Futurist Thomas Frey of the DaVinci Institute, in a white paper called *The Future of Libraries*, cites a number of trends affecting society and libraries. He notes that communication systems are continually changing the way people access information; more and more, people are expecting free or inexpensive access to everything all the time (Frey n.d.). People also want experiences now, not just products. In addition, miniaturization of information storage capacity is rapidly reaching its limit, which means that speed, reliability and durability will soon replace storage capacity as the holy grail of technology. In the face of these and other changes, Frey believes libraries will help communities assess priorities and support what the community decides is important.

Jaron Lanier, author of *You Are Not a Gadget: A Manifesto*, in an interview in *Library Journal* says that libraries will have a new life providing the thinking space for civilization (West 2010). This means that even though we now have constant access

to information, what we lack is the time and space to sit down and think about how to use all that information. Our homes no longer provide that kind of refuge, but libraries can. And Eli Neiburger (2011), of the Ann Arbor Library District in Michigan, says that in the 20th century, libraries brought the world to their communities, but in the 21st century, libraries will bring their communities to the world.

Barriers to Success

In addition to technological and societal trends, libraries face other pressures. On the practical level, these include stagnant or shrinking budgets accompanied by rising and changing demand; dealing with old business models (both internally and externally); staff ability to keep up with the pace of change; and community expectations. Libraries face heightened competition from places such as Amazon and iTunes. Demographic shifts such as the aging population and ethnic change will further challenge libraries.

The tradition of public funding of public libraries is a long one in the U.S. However, funding models in Maine are highly variable. Of Maine's 263 public libraries, six get no public funding at all. Fully 23 percent receive less than half of their operating budget from public dollars. Some libraries in Maine have endowments that keep them going. Others rely on fund raising and donations. (Barbara McDade's article, this issue, provides further detail on governance and funding of Maine libraries.)

The addition of e-books into the publishing market has created some problems for libraries. Users want (digital) e-content, but libraries are dealing with publishers who have not yet found their way to a new business model for this format. Recently, prices for libraries to purchase e-books have skyrocketed, and some publishers refuse to sell to libraries at all. Articles by Allen and Sullivan in this issue present the varying viewpoints of publishers and librarians on the thorny concerns surrounding e-books and libraries.


Library staffs find it difficult to keep up both with the pace of change and with patron expectations. With libraries just barely keeping up with rising costs, it can be difficult to find the budget and time to experiment with all the new technologies and initiatives that arise. How can a one-person library, with limited budget

and open hours, help patrons with their new Nooks and Kindles when the library is unable to afford to buy such devices for staff training before the patrons start coming in? How do libraries with limited budgets supply e-content for these new devices when the cost is twice that of the same item in print? The many one-person libraries in small towns in Maine face particular difficulties.

Often, communities expect too little of libraries because they are not aware of the possibilities and their librarians are too busy running the library to exert the necessary leadership. Growing the next generation of library leaders is a significant concern across the profession. To be a leader, librarians have to step out of their comfort zone and get out of the library and into the community.

CONCLUSION

How will libraries remain relevant in the face of change? By doing what they've always done—assessing the needs of their communities and developing services and programs to meet those needs. Libraries are facing a major transition as society continues to evolve. But libraries have always been quiet, comfortable places where people gather. Librarians are among the most trusted public employees around and communities continue to have pride in their libraries. The future of libraries lies in embracing the changes and finding innovative ways to expand the library's role as community center.

R. David Lankes (2012) says that a great library inspires, challenges, provokes, and respects the community it serves. The library of the future is about knowledge creation and sharing. Libraries and librarians that take a proactive approach by working with their communities to identify the aspirations and dreams of their citizens will thrive. These librarians will embrace the role of digital steward, becoming mentors and facilitators and moving their communities forward. Expect libraries to evolve into advocates for their communities in our complex digital world; centers of learning and innovation; and places that help communities create and distribute knowledge. Expect the library to be the third place that glues the community together. 

Please turn the page for references and information about the authors.

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