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## Portable Libraries

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# Portable Libraries

By Steve Podgajny

Public libraries are changing dramatically in the pursuit of increasing their relevancy and improving the quality and focus of services to a tremendous range of users. The extent of this change is not *incremental*, but is in fact *transformational* in its scope, with its

for our users; assuming a leadership role in Portland's cultural community; and finally transcending the four physical locations of the library by creating a series of deposit collections in collaboration with neighborhood partners, i.e., "portable libraries." In the ensuing three years, many of the assertions addressing the nature of library organizational change and the need for a new library service delivery model have been proven correct.

As part of its portable library strategy, PPL has installed deposit collections in several locations in the city including the downtown METRO station, Reiche Community Center in the City's west end, and now several coffee houses on the Portland peninsula. To further expand the reach of the library, a new bookmobile (see photo), funded in part by KeyBank, was

unveiled this spring. Able to house 1,500 items, it provides wireless access for technology instruction and for staff to issue cards and manage patron service. Roof-mounted solar panels provide backup power.

The bookmobile has identified 23 stops initially and will work with partners to identify at-risk neighborhoods. As part of Portland's newly established ConnectEd collaboration, the library is working with partners to address the "summer slide" phenomenon when children lose momentum in development of reading and math skills. The goal will be nothing short of establishing lifelong



Maine Historical Society

*Booklovers Library wagon, Portland, ca. 1902. This was a subscription library, located at 537 Congress Street in 1902–03 and in 1904 moved to 534 Congress Street.*

pace being accelerated through developments in technology, higher user expectations, fiscal stress, and information industry realities. The Portland Public Library (PPL) is fully affected by and engaged in this environment of required adaptation but also of opportunity.

In the spring of 2010 faced with severe funding challenges, PPL conceived a new service strategy in a white paper, *Beyond the Walls: A library Service Model for Portland, Maine*. The service strategy contained provisions for surveying the community; refocusing staff skills and energy toward the needs of identified users by creating service teams; creating quality environments (physical, digital, and outreach)



*Portland's new bookmobile, 2013.*

reading relationships with children, families, and individuals, to “Create a City of Readers.” The bookmobile will also visit Southern Maine Library District (SMLD) libraries in York, Cumberland, and part of Oxford County annually.

The bookmobile will also serve as a method for delivering the programs of PPL’s Constituency Service Teams, which are Business & Government, Children, City of Readers, Cultural Center, Health, Portland History, Science & Technology, and Teens. Responsibilities of the teams include collection development in all formats, programming, staff development, promotion, partnership development, and community outreach. The major bookmobile use will be by the City of Readers Team to empower, encourage, and provide opportunity to every resident of Portland—of all ages—to read.

The portable library concept whether it is through deposit collections or a bookmobile lending materials or delivering programs is founded on a simple idea: take the library to the people—where they work, live, recreate, and do business. 🐟



**Steve Podgajny** has served as a public librarian for 35 years, the last 32 as a director. Since 2006, he has served as the executive director of the Portland Public Library, Maine’s most heavily used cultural institution with more than 666,000 visits each year.



*Coburn Hall, University of Maine, built in 1888, was named after Governor Abner Coburn who donated \$100,000 to found a library and finance the building's construction.*



*Students study in Coburn Hall, which served as the University's library from 1888 to 1907. The building housed classroom and administrative office space for the president, as well as the library.*



*Andrew Carnegie donated \$50,000 to construct Carnegie Hall as the campus library in 1907, the first University of Maine building whose primary purpose was to support library services. It was one of Maine's five academic and 18 public libraries funded by Carnegie. In 1947 the library moved to what is now the Raymond H. Fogler Library.*



*The Raymond H. Fogler Library, University of Maine, was completed in 1947. In 1963, it became a regional depository site for government documents and a new addition was completed in 1974 to accommodate the library's growing collection. Fogler is the largest research library in the state.*