Folks Are Flocking to the Library, A Cozy Place to Look for a Job—Books, Computers and Wi-Fi Are Free, But Staffs Are Stressed by Crowds, Cutbacks

By Jim Carlton
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TRACY, Calif. – The financial crisis has caused a lot of withdrawals at the public library. A few years ago, public libraries were being written off as goners. The Internet had made them irrelevant, the argument went. But libraries across the country are reporting jumps in attendance of as much as 65% over the past year, as newly unemployed people flock to branches to fill out resumes and scan ads for job listings.

Other recession-weary patrons are turning to libraries for cheap entertainment — killing time with the free computers, video rentals and, of course, books.

Last Friday, there was a particularly long waiting list of 157 to check out the popular vampire novel “Twilight,” by Stephenie Meyer, from a branch of the Stockton-San Joaquin County Library here in Tracy. This central California town has been ravaged by mortgage foreclosures, and area libraries report a surge of traffic. Shamika Miller huddled over a laptop at the Tracy branch. Laid off from her job as a bookkeeper at Home Depot more than a year ago, Ms. Miller, 29 years old, says she has visited the library “if not every day, every other day” since October to check job listings with her computer.

“I come here, first of all, because it’s a free Wi-Fi spot,” says Ms. Miller, who supports a 10-year-old daughter on her unemployment compensation. And, she says, “there’s something about the library that helps you think, at least for me.”

At the Ferguson Library in Stamford, Conn., “it’s not unusual for us to have 40 or 50 reserves on a popular book,” says spokeswoman Linda Avellan. At the Randolph County Public Library in Asheboro, N.C., “a 25% increase in visitors over the past six months from a year ago has been hard on 14-year-old carpeting that officials say needs to be replaced now rather than in six years, as planned.

This isn’t the first time library attendance has spiked in a downturn. The 1987 and 2001 recessions saw attendance has spiked in a downturn.

The 1987 and 2001 recessions saw large spikes in library attendance. As our new Castro Valley Library is being built, we commemorate this year’s National Library Week in partnership with several local businesses. These retailers are directing a portion of their sales towards purchase of contents for our library. Specifics of their offers is posted on our web site (www.aclf.org). Additional businesses wishing to participate can contact Scott at 510-745-1551.

Be sure to show your library card when visiting these retailers during the week of April 12-18!

Our THANKS to the following businesses supporting National Library Week:

Barneys & Noble – 4 East Bay Locations
Big Apple Bagels – Castro Valley
ChipoShoe Mexican Grill
Don Jose Restaurant
Knudsen’s Ice Creamery
Merle’s Hallmark
Pyramio’s Pizzeria
Rigutti’s Restaurant

Amy J. Cheney Librarian For Alameda County Library's Write To Read - Juvenile Justice Center Program Receives National Award: I Love My Librarian

Amy J. Cheney was named one of 10 librarians recognized for service to their communities, schools and campuses as winners of the Carnegie Corporation of New York/ New York Times I Love My Librarian Award. More than 3,200 library users nationwide nominated a librarian. Each of the 10 award winners receives a $5,000 cash award and was honored at a ceremony and reception in New York City.


The ALA administered the award through the Campaign for America's Libraries, its public awareness campaign that promotes the value of libraries and librarians.

The award was presented to Amy J. Cheney for her work at the Alameda County Library. Ms. Cheney provides library services for incarcerated youth at the Alameda County Juvenile Justice Center. She is known as an advocate of these youth with a dedication to providing great reading choices, well known author presentations and workshops that influence the youth's ability to make good choices after incarceration.

“Librarians are even more important to their communities in this digital age,” said Vartan Gregorian, president of Carnegie Corporation of New York. “They are the people many turn to for help in navigating the complex and information-rich world of the web where the quality of the research and reports is not always clear.”

Janet L. Robinson, president and chief executive officer of The New York Times Company said, "Literacy and public access to knowledge are critical to our democracy and the work of these librarians quite simply, enriches us all."
The Alameda County Library Foundation is gearing up for its 5th annual Fundraising gala June 5th 2009 at 6:30pm.

And this year our guests will have the opportunity to play Librarial Pursuit....our delightfully entertaining home-grown trivia contest.

Individual tickets are $100 and blocks of 12 tickets are $1,000. The event takes place at the Fremont Main Library on Friday, June 5th, 2009 from 6:30pm- 9:30pm. Sponsorship and volunteer opportunities available! For more information and tickets, contact ACLF Development Director, Tlona Smith at 510.745.1542 / tsmitn@aclf.org or Event Producer, James Reber at 408.505.0438 / james@jamesreber.com.

This year’s gala is entitled "Eden Hospital Event to Celebrate the First Million for the New Castro Valley Library". The Castro Valley Library Capital Campaign has raised $1 million in pledged funds!

Grass-roots support is spurring progress in the campaign named "Opening the Door to Lifelong Learning." To celebrate this accomplishment Eden Hospital will be hosting a private Design & Construction Update on April 2nd.

The campaign started out with success in attracting several larger gifts from foundations. It then expanded through increasing involvement of Castro Valley residents, local businesses, community organizations, and interested individuals throughout the county. This is very much a grass roots campaign, composed of hundreds of small and medium sized gifts.

The April 2nd fundraising event will be held at the Eden Hospital Convention Center.

Fremont resident Camille Minichino, author of 13 mystery novels will be the guest speaker. Camille's latest novel Malice in Miniature, under her pen name Margaret Grace, will be discussed. You may pick up a copy at the Library or from Jordan's Books in Castro Village. For further information contact Richard Aljuni at 510-745-1514, or an Event Committee Member.

The Event Committee consists of: Claudia & Rick Felson, Lynn & George Pacheco, Pat & Bob Deyu, Marla & Ted Ritchie, and Melissa & Jim Phillips.

The Castro Valley community is answering the call made by Richard Aljuni, Executive Director of the Alameda County Library Foundation: "The quality, depth and sustainability of your new library will be determined by the success of this capital campaign." The campaign goal is $3 million with a deadline of fall 2009. For further campaign information or to make a donation please contact Richard Aljuni at 510-745-1514. The Library Foundation website is: www.aclf.org.