



Libraries at the Heart of Our Communities

by Wayne Senville

- Is there a place in your community:
- where residents of all ages and incomes visit and enjoy spending their time?
 - where people go to hear interesting speakers discuss new ideas, books, travel, and a broad range of topics?
 - where comprehensive databases are available free of charge?
 - where you can get help when applying for a job?
 - where you can stop by and take home a book, CD, or DVD at virtually no cost?
- That's also a place:
- that's "owned" by everyone in the community?
 - and can be counted on, day after day, to draw people downtown or to main street?

In a growing number of cities and towns, there's one answer to all these questions: the public library.

ANCHORS FOR OUR CITIES & TOWNS

Dramatic new or renovated libraries have become cornerstones of downtown in dozens of cities, including Denver, San Antonio, Des Moines, Indianapolis, and Salt Lake City, to name a few.

Noted architect and writer Witold Rybczynski offers an online slide show titled, "How do you build a public library in the age of Google?"¹ His main point: libraries are far from dead in today's Internet age – in fact, they're making a comeback as key anchors in our downtowns. Indeed, they're bringing us full circle to the "end of the 19th century and the beginning of

the 20th, when cities such as Boston, New York, Philadelphia, Detroit, and Chicago built ambitious public libraries."

It's important to recognize, however, that it's not just big cities that benefit from libraries. In fact, smaller cities and towns may have even more to gain from having a thriving library as they don't have the range of community gathering places that larger cities often have.

Reporter Annie Stamper writes that: "No more just a place to find books, today's library is a place that extends far beyond its physical walls with the addition of digital information and access. Particularly in small towns, the library is

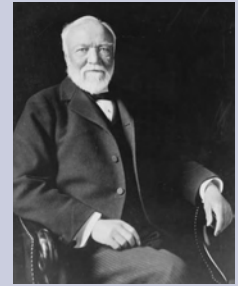


The central rotunda inside the Hudson, Ohio library.

often the hub of the community, providing a place for residents to meet, as well as to learn."²

Libraries, like city halls and post offices, are key to strong communities. Ed McMahon, a senior fellow at the Urban Land Institute, has pointed out that "public buildings and spaces create identity and a sense of place. They give communities something to remember and admire. The challenge facing public architecture is to provide every generation with structures that link them with

"THERE IS NOT SUCH A CRADLE OF DEMOCRACY UPON THE EARTH AS THE FREE PUBLIC LIBRARY, THIS REPUBLIC OF LETTERS, WHERE NEITHER RANK, OFFICE, NOR WEALTH RECEIVES THE SLIGHTEST CONSIDERATION."



– Andrew Carnegie

their past, fill them with pride, and reinforce their sense of belonging."³

Keeping libraries in the center of town, and having them reflect high standards of design, is a challenge a growing number of communities are successfully meeting.

Hudson's Star Attraction

I stopped in Hudson, Ohio, this April as part of my "Circle The USA" trip to learn about their library. Hudson is a small city (population 22,439), midway between Cleveland and Akron. It has elements of both a suburb and a small town. In the center of Hudson is its historic Main Street business district, home to the city's library.

Opened in 2005, the library is housed in a stately brick building, with functional but very attractively-designed interior spaces. The focal point of the library is its rotunda, proof that the design of libraries today can match that of the classic Carnegie library buildings of a century ago.

New libraries tend to need considerably more space than their earlier counterparts. That's the case in Hudson, where the new library building (at 50,000 square feet) is much bigger than

1 Available online at: www.slate.com/id/2184927/

2 In an article in the June 2006 *Champlain Business Journal*, "Libraries Anchor Small Communities."

3 From "Public Buildings Should Set the Standard" (PCJ #41, Winter 2001); available to order & download at: www.plannersweb.com/wfiles/w206.html

the old building (at 17,000 square feet).

At first blush, this seems counter-intuitive. Why in today's Internet and digital age would libraries need to be larger? More importantly, why do they seem in even greater demand?

I asked Assistant Director Margie Smith what draws people to the Hudson library. "It's become the cultural, entertainment, and social hub of Hudson," she replied. "The library programs a lot of readings, there are musical performances every week, and we also have meeting rooms."

The library also provides over 50 public computer terminals, access to state and local databases, and a collection of more than 7,000 DVDs. There's also a coffee shop to hang out in, and an outdoor patio. You can even borrow laptops from the library, and use them anywhere in the building or on the patio. What's more, the Hudson library doesn't close till 9 pm, Monday through Thursday, and is open a total of 69 hours each week, making it even more accessible.



Mark Richardson in front of the Hudson library.

The library is funded primarily through a property tax levy (raising \$1.4 million), with just over \$1 million more from the State of Ohio. The library also makes extensive use of volunteers, including "tech wizards" who help out in the computer center.

The residents of Hudson have decided that the library is a key service they want for their community. The numbers attest to this, as there are more than 23,000 registered library users, who checked out 736,000 items last year. The library counted more than 700,000 visits, an average of well over 2,000 every day it was open.

For planners, however, I want to touch on what may be the most interesting aspect of the Hudson library: its location. It is part of an expansion of Hudson's Main Street district.

Indeed, you could say the library is Main Street's star attraction. As Hudson City Planner Mark Richardson told me, "you can't just rely on retail in downtown expansion, you need an activity center like a library." "The library," Richardson continued, "fulfills its role as the anchor by creating opportunities for multi-stop trips downtown."

The Main Street extension (called First & Main) consists of a mix of retail, office, and housing. The City has architectural design standards for the area. As Richardson notes, "the idea was for it to be a natural extension, not a replication, of Main Street." The streets are laid out in a grid, connecting with the old village.

From Richardson's perspective as a planner, having the library downtown is also cost-effective. As he explains, "the library's location downtown has helped facilitate numerous partnerships and collaborations with the merchants; the public, private, and parochial schools; and the City of Hudson because they are all located in close proximity ... these collaborations have allowed the library to stretch its tax dollars and, at the same time, more effectively serve the needs of Hudson."

The Economic Benefits of Libraries

As is the case in Hudson, libraries can bring substantial benefits to downtowns and main street districts. Planning consultant Robert Gibbs has observed that "a typical public library draws 500 to 1,500 people a day, that's close to the draw of a small department store." Public buildings like libraries, he notes, "add to the authenticity of a town ... they make

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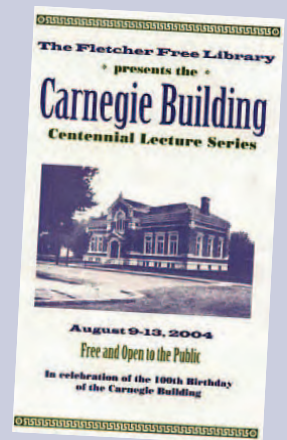
Carnegie's Legacy to America's Cities & Towns

Many cities and towns across America are still blessed by what was perhaps the greatest philanthropic legacy this country ever received: Andrew Carnegie's grants program to help fund the construction of libraries in communities large and small.

From 1896 to 1925 Carnegie provided grants for the construction of 1,681 libraries in 49 states (plus 156 in Canada) – only Rhode Island was somehow left out! About 70 percent of the Carnegie libraries were built in small towns with fewer than 10,000 people – with the first of the typical Carnegie-funded libraries being constructed in Fairfield, Iowa.

Invariably, a Carnegie library was a well-designed building, often a local landmark in the center of town. Fortunately, most of the Carnegie libraries are still standing, many remaining in active use as local libraries, treasured by generations of residents.

In my hometown of Burlington, Vermont, that's certainly the case – the Fletcher Free Library was built with a \$50,000 gift from Andrew Carnegie in 1904.



The Fletcher Free Library in Burlington, Vermont.



Right, view of Hudson's Main Street. Left, commercial development is adjacent to the library in the Main Street extension.



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it less of a shopping center and more of a town center.”⁴

Seattle is another city that has gained substantial economic benefits from its new downtown library, opened in 2004. An economic assessment prepared for the City found that “the Library is associated with \$16 million in net new spending in Seattle in its first year of operations – equal to \$80 million for 5 years,” and that “nearby businesses report increases in spending associated with Library visitors.” As a result, “the increased number of Library visitors contributes to Downtown vitality and vibrancy, making Downtown a more attractive residential and commercial market.”⁵

As Brian Murphy of the Seattle-based Berk & Associates, which prepared the economic assessment, told me, “the library has become an important part of a network of attractions in Seattle.” In part, this is because of the library’s dramatic design. Its location close to downtown residential neighborhoods and the city’s retail core is also a big plus, he added.

Perhaps more surprising is another major draw that Murphy pointed to, the Seattle library’s extensive genealogical resources, which attract visitors from a wide area. Indeed, the library has more than 40,000 items in its collection, and three full-time genealogy reference librarians to provide assistance.


“A Harbor You Can Sail Into”

Those are the words that Stephen Coronella used to describe the role of the Putney, Vermont, public library. For Coronella, who’s the librarian in this

small Vermont town (population 2,600), a good library works a lot like a harbor. It provides a place where people can dock themselves for a while, socialize with others, and feel some comfort and security.

When I met with Coronella, he explained that over the years libraries have become more multi-faceted. They’re no longer just places to read and take out books (though that’s still a key function). Increasingly, libraries are providing a broader range of services, from access to research databases, to loaning videos and CDs, to providing Internet access, to offering space for lectures and public meetings.

The Putney library attracts one hundred or more people on a daily basis, and forty or fifty more often show up for evening programs. You’ll find people of all ages, incomes, and backgrounds using the Putney library. Its seven public access computers are very popular, and offer a

valuable service in this rural community where residential broadband service is limited.  *Internet Access*, p. 16.

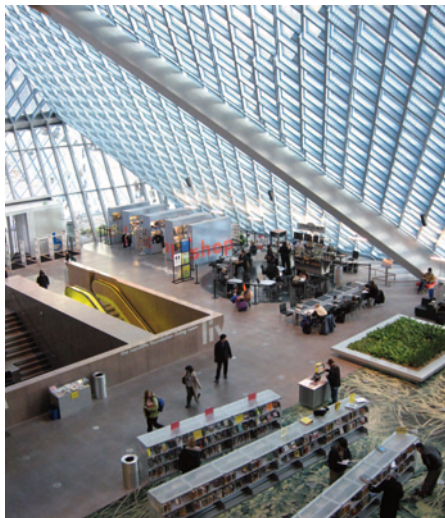
The library’s beautiful new building is located within walking distance of the town center (less than half-a-mile away) and next to a co-op market and senior housing. The new building was made possible in part from a generous donor, but also through extensive fund-raising in the Putney community.

The importance of libraries like Putney’s to village and town centers was underscored in a public forum sponsored by the Windham Regional Commission (the WRC’s service area includes Putney, Brattleboro, and 25 other small towns in southeastern Vermont). As Kendall Gifford, a planner with the WRC, told me, it “opened up perceptions of what libraries have to offer.”

One by-product of the forum was the formation of a task force to develop recommendations for strengthening local libraries within the region. The task force’s report, *The New Heart of the Old Village Center: The Role of the Library in Community Development*, includes a series of recommendations centered on three goals: to achieve universal access to library services; to assure adequate funding for libraries; and to use libraries to strengthen village centers.

Susan McMahon, another planner with the WRC, has been struck by how often people have mentioned the value of their libraries “as community places, where you can see your neighbors,” and by the importance that seniors, in particular, place on having a library nearby.

One problem facing local libraries in Vermont – and many other states – is the




Views of the Seattle Public Library. Left: “Living Room” by Padriac, www.flickr.com/photos/padraits_travels/2179049925. Right: “Seattle Public Library” by Rodefled, www.flickr.com/photos/rodefeld/1622522316. Images licensed, Creative Commons.R



Putney library and librarian Stephen Coronella, below nearby food co-op..



lack of state financial support. This puts the burden on cities and towns to provide funding from their municipal budget. Not surprisingly, this can be a major hurdle, especially in communities with limited resources.  *What's the State of Your Library?*

While private organizations like the Freeman Foundation (in Vermont) and the Gates Foundation (nationwide) have stepped up to provide financial support, this is not a long-term solution. Recognizing this, the Windham Regional Commission task force report points out the importance of educating legislators, community leaders, and residents about libraries' funding needs "in the context of all the positive community and economic benefits" they bring.

From a national perspective, why shouldn't libraries be more highly valued? In 2006, the most recent year for which data is available, there were some 1.4 billion visits to the nation's 9,208 public libraries.⁶

To put library visits in perspective, consider that in 2007 the attendance at



major league baseball games was 81 million and NFL football, 22 million – add in NCAA men's and women's basketball (43 million) and football (49 million) and the total is less than 15 percent the number of visits to public libraries.⁷

Yet libraries may well be the single most important civic institution in America today. As scholar Vartan Gregorian has noted, "Across America we are coming to realize the library's unsurpassed importance as a civic institution ... In our democratic society, the library stands for hope, for learning, for progress, for literacy, for self-improvement and for civic engagement. The library is a symbol of opportunity, citizenship, equality, freedom of speech and freedom of thought, and hence, is a symbol for democracy itself. It is a critical component in the free exchange of information, which is at the heart of our democracy."⁸

The Hub of Moab

Twenty-two hundred miles west of Putney, Vermont, is the small city of Moab, Utah. Their new library, opened in 2006, is just two blocks off Main Street in the heart of the city's compact downtown.

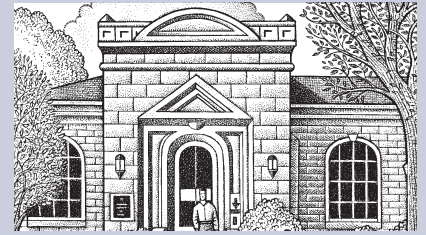
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⁴ Quoted by journalist Phil Langdon in "Public Buildings Keep Town Centers Alive" (*PCJ* #49, Winter 2003); available to order & download at: www.plannersweb.com/wfiles/w144.html.

⁵ *The Seattle Public Library Central Library: Economic Benefits Assessment* (prepared for the City of Seattle Office of Economic Development and The Seattle Public Library Foundation by Berk & Associates, July 2005); available at: www.spl.org/pdfs/SPLCentral_Library_Economic_Impacts.pdf.

⁶ *Public Libraries Survey, Fiscal Year 2006* (Institute of Museum & Library Services, Dec. 2008), pp. 4-6.

⁷ Sports attendance data from *The 2009 Statistical Abstract* (U.S. Bureau of the Census), Tables 1204/1205. Unfortunately, the *Statistical Abstract* does not include attendance for all sports, but you get the picture.



What's the State of Your Library?

Due to the recession and hard economic times, many libraries have been cutting their hours, and some have even been forced to close down. In researching this article, I came across countless news reports from across the country with examples of this.

Ironically, it's during an economic downturn that libraries are in even more demand, both as a resource for job seekers, and as a place where people can borrow a book, video, or CD, or spend some time using the computer. Moreover, as you'll read elsewhere in this article, libraries are too often under-valued for the economic benefits they also bring to downtowns, main streets, and neighborhood commercial districts.

How much support do libraries receive from state government? Data from the U.S. Department of Education's National Center for Educational Statistics (*Public Libraries in the United States: Fiscal Year 2004*) shows there's an extremely wide variation in state fiscal support for public libraries. On a per capita basis, it ranges from \$40.06 in Ohio and \$19.51 in Hawaii (the two highest) to virtually zero in South Dakota and just over 1 cent per person in Vermont (the two lowest). The national average is only \$3.21 per person, a very low figure.*

Once the economy is back to full strength, consider ways in which your state can better support local libraries. It can be done. Ohio, for one, provides substantial financial support to its libraries, with a dedicated 2.22% of all tax revenue from the state's General Revenue Fund going to public libraries. Perhaps this explains why Ohio has more public libraries – and higher levels of library use – per capita than any other state.

* This data is available online at: http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2006/2006349_1.pdf (Table 16).



Internet Access

One of the essentials of being informed today is having Internet access. That's still a problem in many rural areas, and for low-income households. Public libraries are a critically important resource in terms of broadening the availability of this access.

A nationwide survey conducted last year by the Florida State University's Information Institute focused on the Internet and libraries. Two of the most striking findings: 72.5 percent of libraries reported that they are the only provider of free public computer and Internet access in their community, while 98.9 percent of public libraries indicated that they offer Internet access.* Moreover, according to the Institute of Museum & Library Service, in 2006 a total of 196,000 Internet computers were available in America's public libraries (3.4 per 5,000 people).**

Another sign of the times: the rapid increase in the number of libraries offering wireless access – an increase from 54 to 66 percent of libraries in just the past year.*** Wireless access is of value not just to residents, but to tourists and business travelers when they visit a community.

* *Public Libraries and the Internet 2008: Study Results and Findings.*

** *Public Libraries Survey Fiscal Year 2006* (Institute for Museum & Library Services, Dec. 2008), p. 5.

*** *Id. Public Libraries and the Internet ...*

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Moab is located in a remote, but spectacularly beautiful, corner of Utah, and is home to Arches National Park, a thriving recreational industry, and residents who love the outdoors.⁹ But it is also home to a fine new county library, at 15,000 square feet, triple the size of its former location.

The library itself is a delightful place. When I stepped inside, it was a beehive of activity, with people of all ages engrossed in reading and, yes, in using the Internet.

In fact, Internet use has been booming. When I followed up with Library Director Carrie Valdes this May, she told me that the number of online sessions last year exceeded 93,000, up from 75,000 in 2007. The library building is also wireless. In part, the growth in Internet use owes to the fact that anything faster than dial-up service is very costly in Moab. Valdes also believes that the economic downturn has led to increased use, especially as more people are looking to access online job search services.

The Grand County library is part of a small complex of public buildings, making it even more convenient for area residents. Right next door are the municipal offices, in a recently rehabbed former elementary school building.

The Library Board saw the need to purchase the property the library is now

since there are few large parcels available close to downtown). Valdes believes that keeping the library downtown was critically important. As she put it, "everything that happens in Moab, happens downtown."

Owing to its welcoming environment, expanded size (allowing for the addition of a dedicated children's room), and the state of the economy, library use has surged – from an annual average of about 90,000 visits before the new building opened to 150,000 last year. It has become, says Valdes, "a true community center."

LIBRARIES MIX IT UP

"Among private sector developers of malls, commercial corridors, mixed-use developments and joint-use facilities, libraries are gaining recognition for other qualities – their ability to attract tremendous foot traffic, provide long-term tenancy, and complement neighboring retail and cultural destinations." That's from a recent report, *Making Cities Stronger: Public Library Contributions to Local Economic Development*, prepared by the Urban Library Council.¹⁰

As the report continues, "Library buildings are versatile. They fit in a wide mix of public and private sector developments. Library leaders and private developers across the country are beginning to notice distinct advantages to incorporating public libraries into mixed use, retail and residential areas."

You can now find libraries not just in malls, but as part of residential developments, and other mixed-use projects.

In the Chicago suburb of Des Plaines, the new library – which opened in August 2000 – is located next to a stop on one of the METRA commuter rail lines. It is the central element of

8 Vartan Gregorian, "Libraries as Acts of Civic Renewal" (speech given in Kansas City, Missouri, July 4, 2002; available online at: www.carnegie.org/sub/pubs/gregorianspeech.html).

9 See also my report from Moab (part of my Crossing America on Route 50 trip) at: www.rte50.com/2007/07/two-moabs.html.

10 Prepared by the Urban Library Council (Jan. 2007); currently available at: www.urban.org/publications/1001075.html



located on several years ago. It wanted to "lock in" a downtown site for use when the time came for expansion (important

Views of the Grand County library in Moab, Utah.

W. SEVILLE



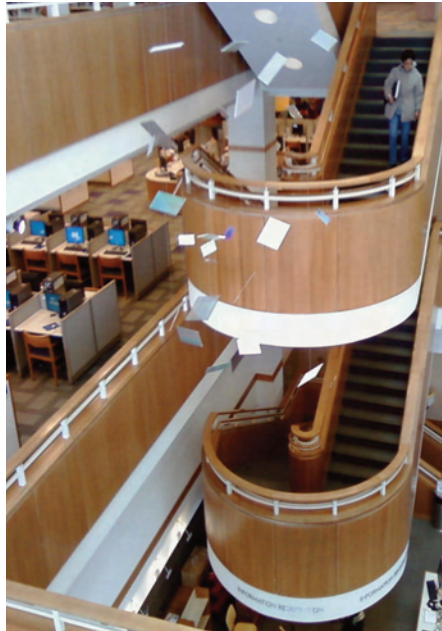
The Des Plaines library seen on right of above photo; adjacent housing on the left. Center photo shows library's interior.

a 6.2-acre redevelopment that also includes 30,000 square feet of retail, a 180-unit condominium, and a parking garage. This mix of complementary uses has created a hub of activity in the heart of this suburban city of 58,000.¹¹

In putting together the project, the library served as the traffic anchor, “much like a large retailer would” explained Stephen Friedman of S.B. Friedman & Co. His firm, which specializes in advising communities on public/private partnerships, worked with the City of Des Plaines on the redevelopment. Having a high quality library, Friedman adds, is also an important part of being a “full service” community, something that suburbs are increasingly focusing on as they seek to create a high quality of life for residents.

Another interesting point that Friedman makes is the importance of libraries in middle-income communities like Des Plaines. “People can’t always afford Barnes & Noble or Borders,” he notes, but many middle-income individuals are highly educated, “so the library becomes a critical public service for them.”

In St. Paul, Minnesota, the 31,000-square foot Rondo Community Outreach library is on the ground floor of a new building that includes three floors of mixed-income housing, plus a floor of parking immediately above the library (serving the apartments) and under-



ground parking below (for library patrons).

The project grew out of a desire by the City and neighborhood to redevelop what had been the site of an adult entertainment theater – a focal point of community anger – demolished after the City acquired the property. The idea of a mixed-use building emerged from a conjunction of interests: the City’s goal of providing more affordable housing and the fact that the existing neighborhood public library had outgrown its building.¹²

According to Alice Neve, Supervisor of the Rondo Area Libraries, having the library in the same building as the housing provided some significant economies of scale, allowing for more space than if the library had been built as a stand-alone building. Families living in the apartments above, Neve notes, are also (not surprisingly) frequent visitors to the library.

A HOME FOR ALL OF THE COMMUNITY

Libraries provide something increasingly scarce in our cities and towns, what Brattleboro, Vermont, library director Jerry Carbone described to me as “neutral public space.”

Carbone explained that Brattleboro’s Brooks Memorial Library, in the heart of

SPECIAL FAMILIES NEED SPECIAL LIBRARIES

Family Times

Presented by Rainbow Animal Assisted Therapy
Saturdays
11 a.m. - noon
February 21 March 21
April 18 May 16

Family Times provide parents or caregivers opportunity to leave their child with a Meeting Room C (first floor), where they interact with specially trained dogs (the Animal Assisted Therapy). Children and caregivers may attend a variety of programs or explore other library resources. Sponsored by the Friends of the Library.

Please register at the Youth Services Center at www.dpl.org. Click on the link on the page you will learn how to register your digital photographs with Adobe Photoshop Express, a free online program. Space is limited. Register at the Registration Desk, 847-374-2747 or online at www.dpl.org. Computer Lab, 4th Floor

Shooting Live Models and Still Life Art Drop-In Session from 11 a.m. - 2 p.m.

ADULT PROGRAM - HOBBIES

Digital Camera Party

Presented by Jerry Hug
Saturday, March 7 10 a.m. - 4 p.m.

Photo Editing, Free Online
Three one-hour sessions at 10 a.m., 11 a.m. and 1 p.m. In this hands-on class you will learn how to edit your digital photographs with Adobe Photoshop Express, a free online program. Space is limited. Register at the Registration Desk, 847-374-2747 or online at www.dpl.org. Computer Lab, 4th Floor

Shooting Live Models and Still Life Art Drop-In Session from 11 a.m. - 2 p.m.

MOVIES!

Friday Night Films

“The best in international, independent and documentary film”
Films begin at 6:30 p.m.

February 20 **War Dance** 103 minutes, Rated PG-13, Documentary Film
This Oscar-nominated film follows a group of schoolchildren from a village in western Uganda to a prestigious national music and dance competition.

March 20 **Young@Heart** 107 minutes, Rated PG, Documentary Film
This inspiring film follows the Young@Heart Chorus, a fun-loving group of senior citizens, as they rehearse for a sold-out concert in their hometown. Going against stereotypes, their repertoire includes songs by James Brown, Sam Cooke, and Talking Heads.

April 17 **Rachel Getting Married** 113 minutes, Rated R, Independent Film, Anne Hathaway, Debra Winger
This film paints a family portrait that is at once hilarious and heartbreaking. Self-confident and flamboyant Ben returns home for her sister's wedding where her presence causes long-simmering tensions to surface.

Seating is limited to 40 people on a first come, first served basis. Meeting Room A. Films shown through this program are also included in our circulating collection.

Des Plaines Public Library
1505 Ellwood Street • Des Plaines, IL 60016
847-377-3333 • www.dpl.org

downtown, makes its community room available at no charge to local organizations three evenings every week. The fact that it is public space, Carbone notes, makes it a more comfortable meeting place for some than a church basement or a business office meeting room – even though these private spaces are typically made available for community meetings in a spirit of good will.

This message was reinforced in a conversation I had with David Lankes, Director of the Information Institute at Syracuse University. As Lankes observed, libraries are in a pivotal role because “there are very few civic organizations left today” that can provide a space accessible to everyone in the community.

But for Lankes, the role of today’s library goes beyond providing community space. Libraries, he argues, should also be actively seeking ways of “enriching and enhancing” issues people are most interested in.

To cite one example, Lankes told me how in several cities, librarians have developed training sessions – open to all – covering the basics of setting up a new business, and putting together a business plan. Along the same lines, some libraries are teaming up with local community development agencies to provide job counseling centers. This level of

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11 The City of Des Plaines even offers a video tour of the library, accessible from their home page: www.desplaines.org/.

12 For more on the Rondo library: www.stpaul.lib.mn.us/locations/rondo_about.html.

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engagement goes well beyond the “traditional” role of just providing books about how to set up a business or find a job.¹³

Another valuable role that libraries play is in integrating immigrants and other newcomers into our communities. As national columnist Neil Peirce reports: “In immigrant-heavy suburbs of Washington, D.C., many public libraries have recast themselves as welcome centers. Some checkout desks have signs in Korean, Chinese, Spanish and Vietnamese. A recent immigrant from the Dominican Republic said: ‘I come to the library almost every day. And two days a week I follow the conversation classes. We have the opportunity not only to improve our English but to get new friends from all over the world.’”¹⁴

At the other end of the country, Seattle’s Kent Kammerer points out that “Seniors now flood the libraries for many

reasons including taking computer classes and attending special programs. Young people find willing, friendly help at the library ... and yes, though, the library wasn’t designed to be a hygiene center or daytime shelter, some homeless people find the library the most welcoming place to spend their days.”¹⁵

There’s been a “sea change” in the past five to ten years in the role libraries are playing in communities, says Sari Feldman, Director of the Cuyahoga County, Ohio, Library, which operates 28 branches in Cleveland’s suburbs. Feldman, who is also President-elect of the Public Library Association, told me that “libraries have become vibrant centers of community interaction,” with librarians working more closely with community groups and businesses. In Cuyahoga County, notes Feldman, “the library does extensive focus groups, polling, and market research” to better learn what the community wants.

Libraries have been especially proving their worth during the current recession. As Feldman explains, “we’re clearly the place where people are coming for job information, for preparing online job applications, and for basic financial literacy ... and we provide them support in doing this.”

SUMMING UP:

The 21st century library has arrived. Its mission goes far beyond loaning out books and providing reference materials. In fact, in a growing number of cities and towns, the library has become the hub of the community, drawing large numbers of new users. This is happening because libraries are providing programs, meeting space, computer access, and resources that are responding to a broader array of community needs.

Moreover, when libraries are located in downtown, village, or neighborhood centers, there’s also a special synergy at work. Libraries generate increased business for local merchants, while those shopping or working downtown visit the library as part of their day.

Libraries and community. They’re really inseparable. ♦

Wayne Senville is Editor of the *Planning Commissioners Journal*. His previous articles and reports for the PCJ include “Downtown Futures” (PCJ #69, Winter 2008); “Crossing America” (PCJ #68, Fall 2007); “Bright Ideas” (PCJ #61, Winter 2006); and “Preservation Takes Center Stage” (PCJ #52, Fall 2003).



In the Neighborhood

While this article has focused on the positive impact that libraries can have on downtowns, let’s not forget the powerful benefits that libraries can bring to neighborhoods. Take a look at an excellent short report prepared by the Urban Library Council, *The Engaged Library: Chicago Stories of Community Building*.^{*} It tells of the importance Chicago has placed on strengthening neighborhood libraries:

“Libraries are uniquely positioned to contribute to the local economy. They are local employers. More often than not, libraries bring foot traffic to the neighborhood commercial district. ... The Chicago Public Library has built 40 new branch buildings in the last 11 years. Many of these buildings have gone into areas previously avoided ... Often, CPL has used its capital investments to buy sites that have been neighborhood eyesores. Liquor stores or abandoned buildings are torn down to be replaced with public libraries, changing the streetscape completely. For this strategy to be successful, library administration and planners have to tap into community knowledge and listen to community requests.”

^{*} *The Engaged Library* is available through the ULC web site: www.urbanlibraries.org.



Chicago’s Northtown Library is at the heart of a ethnically diverse neighborhood, and is located just a block from the neighborhood’s retail district.





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Stormwater Management Resources



In the Winter '09 Planning Comm's Journal: [Managing Stormwater Runoff: A Green Infrastructure Approach](#), by Lynn Richards

The U.S. EPA has excellent information about stormwater, with contact information at the local, regional, and national level. They also have a fact sheet on [Street Designs and Patterns](#), extensive information about green infrastructure, and stormwater stickers for kids to collect.

The EPA's Office of Policy, Economics, and Innovation Smart Growth Programs has additional resources on stormwater and development. The Vermont Stream Geomorphic Assessment from the state's Agency of Natural Resources provides a [comprehensive glossary of terms](#) for those new to the vocabulary of stormwater.

Projects highlighted in Lynn Richards' article include:

The [Rain to Recreation Program](#), a regional watershed approach to address stormwater quantity and quality in Lenexa, Kansas. Goals of the program are to reduce flooding, protect water quality and natural habitat, and to provide recreational and educational opportunities. See also PCJ Editor Wayne Senville's [report on this program](#) during his visit to Lenexa in June 2007.



Read more about this innovative residential project in PCJ Editor Wayne Senville's report from Lenexa.

The High Point Redevelopment in Seattle, Washington received a National Award for Smart Growth Achievement in 2007. For more information on the [stormwater management aspects of the project](#). There's also an excellent article, [High Point: A Blueprint for Greening Affordable Housing in Seattle](#) that's posted on the Terrain.org website.



Interior of High Point project. Photo copyright Bill Holmstrom, AICP.

The City of Burnsville, Minnesota, installed an experimental rain garden system and conducted a study comparing two residential areas, one with rain gardens and one without. The watershed retrofitted with rain gardens saw a 90% reduction in runoff volumes. For more information on [this project](#) (pdf).

[The Belle Hall charrette](#) (pdf), organized by the South Carolina Coastal Conservation League and the City of Mount Pleasant, South Carolina, included town and county officials and planners, private sector engineers, and researchers.

The City of Portland, Oregon, is a national leader in green development practices and stormwater management. Their [Grey to Green website](#) includes information about green streets, swales, eeroofs, and more. Read Tom DiPietro's informative short article, [posted elsewhere on our PlannersWeb site](#), about the new South Burlington, Vermont stormwater utility. The use of stormwater utilities as an approach to managing stormwater is being adopted by a growing number of communities.



Also in the Winter '09 Planning Comm's Journal: [Taking Low Impact Development from Research to Regulations](#), by John Rozum, AICP, and David W. Dickson

Resources related to Rozum & Dickson's article:

The Connecticut NEMO program's website has an inventory of LID installations, a database of LID-friendly regulations, and more information of LID practices and research.

From there you can also link to the [National NEMO Network website](#) and find out if your state has its very own NEMO program. Hopefully those resources will help you on your way to "wicked cool" subdivisions in your community.

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