



Books & Writers



Focusing on technology and convenience,
our libraries are leading the way

By David R. Altman
Books & Writers Editor

"Perhaps no place in any community is as totally democratic as the town library. The only entrance requirement is interest."

- Lady Bird Johnson

Be honest now, how often have you visited the local library?

I don't go often enough, but when I do, I wonder why I don't spend more time there, browsing that serene environment with those endless shelves of books wrapped in plastic covers, just waiting to be chosen.

I didn't go to the Pickens County Library to write this column, but I could have.

Probably like yours, our home is one of the 74 percent of U.S. homes that has access to the internet (this according to the Census Bureau). And the library is just as wired as we are.

But if you're thinking that home computers have led to fewer people using the library, you might be mistaken.

In fact, one study by Pew Research found that more people are using the library than ever before—but the demographics are changing and so is the type of usage.

More women use public libraries than men (72% to 58%) and more minorities and single women visit libraries than ever before. Nearly all public libraries have internet access, making them accessible to those who do not have access at home—so the number of people doing on-line research at libraries has increased dramatically.

Despite facing increasing challenges like budget cuts and rapid advances in technology, America's libraries are re-inventing themselves to stay ahead of cultural changes, demographic shifts and consumer needs.

Buffy J. Hamilton, who was formerly a librarian at Creekview High School in Canton and is a former learning strategist for the Cleveland (Ohio) Public Library, says libraries are no longer "warehouses of books" but instead are becoming "participatory sites of culture and learning that invite, ignite and sustain conversation."

The research supports this. The Pew study found, "...over 94% of Americans say that having a public library improves the quality of life in a community."

Some have described this as the library filling a need—a sort of "third place" for the community to go—behind home and school. Closer to home, our Pickens County Library is part of the Sequoyah Regional Library System, serving eight locations in Pickens, Gilmer and Cherokee counties. And they, too, are moving with the times.

Sequoyah's modern, bright website is full of options for people of all ages, weaving its book collection into the social fabric of our community, promoting things like the Festival of Trees event at the Gilmer and Pickens Libraries and something fun called "Nerd Trivia" at the R.T. Jones library in Canton.

Here in Jasper, there's a program called "Library Yarners", a place for those who have the talent for knitting or crocheting and it's open to anyone interested every Tuesday from 10—11 a.m. And, our Pickens County Library is full of programs for kids, including some fun holiday programs

(Check out their website sequoyahregionallibrary.org/)

According to the *New York Times*, the public library in Darien, Conn. has a first floor that "resembles a bookshop that officials are calling a Marketplace, with cozy seating, vending machines and, above all, an abundance of best sellers."

That's a national trend, and it's also happening here in Jasper. Pickens County High School's



Pics4Learning.com / Photo

Kids learning to blog at a public library in New Jersey.

Media Center (known as the Dragon's Den) is open all day for students and includes not only a computer lab, electronic databases, books, but also has a comfortable reading area, complete with the latest newspapers and magazines, along with "smart snacks, low and zero calorie drinks and a variety of school supplies."

So, libraries are far from a thing of the past. Librarians, media specialists and school administrators have seen the future and they are not only embracing it, they are leading it.

Our libraries are supporting us and our kids through a myriad of consumer and student-friendly programs that focus on both technology and convenience—making them attractive to both students and residents.

Let's return the favor and become library supporters. Make a donation. Become a volunteer.

More importantly, take your kids or grandkids to the library—and let them stay awhile.

The benefits to your kids (and to you) will be immeasurable.

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