6 THINGS TO DO AT YOUR LOCAL LIBRARY

Sean Lahman | Rochester Democrat and Chronicle | USA TODAY NETWORK

To some, libraries may seem like an antiquated concept in the digital age. Why would anybody want to borrow a dusty old book when they can access the world’s literature in e-book form with the touch of a button?

In the first few months after opening its doors, the new Irondequoit Public Library saw a 34 percent increase in visitors. The same thing happened in Gates, as that town’s new library drew large crowds.

A detailed study by the Pew Research Center found that this local pattern reflects a national trend: Libraries continue to be an incredibly popular resource, especially among millennials.

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Part of the reason is that libraries have undergone significant changes in the last 20 years, and they’re no longer just a place to visit to borrow a book.

Here are six other things you can do at your local libraries.

Make something

Most libraries have computers that patrons can use, but those aren’t the only kinds of tools that are available. The Greece library is one of several in Monroe County that has a 3-D printer available to the public. Folks can come in with their ready-made projects or take a class in 3-D modeling and walk away with their first finished project.

Irondequoit’s library has a Maker’s Lab, which offers soldering irons, Dremel tools, sewing machines and other implements for people who want to make things with their own hands.

And in Webster, you can even get the ingredients to start a garden from the seed library. Each option is labeled by level of difficulty, and the seed packets are arranged alphabetically in the drawers of the old wooden card catalog.

Learn something

The Pew Research study found that a majority of library patrons feel they are “lifelong learners,” and that many people say they learn more in a group setting than at home on the internet.

When librarians in Gates noticed that cooking books were becoming very popular, they started offering cooking classes. In December, the Brighton library offered a Star Wars-themed computer programming class for kids. East Rochester has a regular session for teens interested in electronics and robotics. The Fairport library, like many others, has a wide range of computer classes, from introductory subjects to more in-depth topics.

Many of these classes are free, although they may require you to register in advance. Most libraries have online calendars with more details about their offerings.
Find experts

The main job skill for librarians isn’t putting books on a shelf, it’s knowing how to find information. Many libraries have staff with expertise in specific subjects who are available to answer questions or point people toward other resources.

A great example is the Chester Carlson Patent & Trademark Center at the Central Library downtown. It’s staffed by experts in intellectual property issues who can help inventors and entrepreneurs navigate the legal steps they can take to protect their big idea.

Many local libraries have career centers that can offer help with polishing up your résumé or searching for a job. Some have staff who are experts at helping veterans get connected with services and opportunities that are available and connecting them with outreach centers.

An increasingly popular service, now available at many sites, is one-on-one computer assistance. They can’t help repair your hardware, but they can help you figure out how to set up an email account or how to download e-books onto that new tablet you got for Christmas.

Tap into online resources

Library patrons in Monroe County can access a number of online resources, including subscription-based websites and commercial databases. Many of these services can only be used within the library, but some can be accessed remotely, using your library card to gain access from your own computer.

Nearly a dozen libraries in the county host a local history section, which include searchable digital versions of high school yearbooks, phone directories, old newspapers and even local photo

Borrow other physical media

If books aren’t your thing, there are plenty of other ways to consume content. Most libraries have large collections of music CDs, audiobooks and movies and television shows in DVD or Blu-ray format.

Many libraries also have video games for a variety of platforms.

And at the Central Library, you can even borrow works of art to take home and hang on your wall. The collection includes framed prints and other pieces, from classics such as Van Gogh’s Starry Night to more modern pieces by local artists.

Other items you can borrow from a Rochester library: GPS units, ukuleles, board games and fishing poles.

Meet people

In some Monroe County towns, libraries are located as part of a larger community center. In other locales, the libraries serve as a de facto community center, a place where residents can get together.

Most of the libraries in Monroe County offer a variety of public spaces, from quiet study rooms to large meeting halls than can be used for formal gatherings.

Many of the newer libraries have created teen areas, a place where teens can play video games, watch the latest anime, or just hang out.

Libraries have always been a gathering place, from students collaborating on a project after school to parents and children sitting and reading together. Technology hasn’t changed the need for personal connections and public spaces. In some ways, it’s made libraries even more important in the digital age.

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