

Bradford library opens doors to community — and world

By BOB ESCH | Posted: Sunday, August 2, 2015 9:41 pm

The Bradford Area Public Library serves all of our community. Our library provides educational services; support services for any and all community-based nonprofit organizations; and recreational outlets for all, namely the young, the old, the literate and the non-literate. Our doors are open to individuals with disabilities and those who are developmentally or physically challenged. We partner with all of the local schools, Bradford Regional Medical Center, Bradford Area Chamber of Commerce, the University of Pittsburgh at Bradford, the YMCA and CARE for Children, along with many other local organizations and small businesses.

Publicly funded

Although libraries have a public mission, few have secure funding at any level of government.

Nationwide, only about 1 percent of the operating revenue is derived from federal sources and 10 percent from state sources. The balance comes from local municipal governments, donations, grants, fines and fees. Beyond day-to-day operational costs, funds are needed for collection development, building maintenance, staffing and technology upgrades. Strong philanthropic support is essential and necessary in order to sustain the mission of the library.

Library services

The library is a community center and an agent for educational and economic development. The library's services include literature (books), extension activities (meeting rooms and informational lectures), and information and communication technology. In just the past few months, the library has held a program on solar panels, writing and journaling workshops for teens, several local author presentations, two gardening programs, and many other programs and presentations. Every day, front-desk employees help answer questions about e-readers, tablets, resumes and cover letters, online job applications, and email.

Early childhood development and learning



Bob Esch

We have spent decades defining lifelong learning as learning beyond traditional schooling and throughout our adult life; learning directed toward skills needed for employment and personal fulfillment. I believe that lifelong learning begins at birth, at our first breath. Our community library supports our children in the most critical years of their childhood development. In 1901 in the library's annual report, it said, "It is perhaps, in the Children's Room that the demand for new books is most imperative, a large proportion of our collection is old and unsuited for their needs. With a better and more abundant selection of books, the work done here should constitute one of the most important phases of the library's activity. The room is already proving itself inadequate in size, being greatly overcrowded during busy hours."

This focus and dedication to our children remains strong and evident today. The library supports all of our community children. The library and its Early Literacy Program contribute to their intellectual, emotional, social, and educational and language development needs. Remember that lifelong learning begins with our first breath, and we remain learners until our last breath.

Rural area

Quality library services in rural areas are imperative for the attainment of an enlightened citizenry. In McKean County, we have 22 municipalities, 20 of which are rural. Serving a rural population comes with its own unique challenges. The library may be the only place a patron can have consistent access to a computer or Wi-Fi. As federal, state and municipal budgets continue to tighten and less governmental funding becomes available, it is essential that the library reach out to our caring community for support.

We all know from our own past experiences that when our community comes together, good things happen.

(Editor's note: Esch is the chairman of the "Mad" for the Library Capital Campaign 2015.)