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BELLINGHAM PUBLIC LIBRARY

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2009 ANNUAL REPORT

“If minds are truly alive they will seek out books, for books are the human race recounting its memorable experiences, confronting its problems, searching for solutions, drawing the blueprints of its futures.” ~ Harry A. Overstreet

Honorable Selectmen:

In 2009 the library adapted quite well to numerous challenges and changes. We continued to play a crucial role in the town by being more than just a place to read and borrow books- a true community center that offers services to Bellingham residents of all ages. We provide a clean, modern facility, not just for library services, but for meetings of town groups of all ages. The groups we host include The Bellingham Crafters, the Mom’s Group of Bellingham Medway, The Polish Conversation Group, book discussion groups, condo association meetings and Girl Scout sleepovers.

Staff

In July, due to the 10.4% budget cut, library reduced the hours of 6 of our part time staff, and eliminated 3 part time positions. To meet the challenge of the reduced budget, staff who used to work one Saturday a month, now work every third Saturday, and the rotation now includes professional staff that were not regularly scheduled to work on Saturdays. Our excellent staff continues to be dedicated to providing outstanding services to meet the informational, recreational and cultural needs of our community. We are proud that our spring survey of 2009 found over 92% of respondents rated the library staff “Good” or “Excellent” in Overall Quality of Staff Service.

Facility

This year we continued making cosmetic improvements to areas of the facility which, after 20 years of use, was showing its age. With generous funding from the Girl Scout Gold Award Project of Martine Descoteaux, Friends of the Bellingham Library, and a donation from the Harvard Pilgrim Foundation, we were able to renovate the Children’s Program Room. The renovation included the installation of a wall shelving unit, which enables us to store the growing amount of materials we need to support children’s programming. Also, the countertop and faucet were replaced and the walls were painted. The project has transformed the room into a child friendly, bright, functional space.

We also updated the Young Adult area. With federal LSTA grant funds we were able to purchase new furniture for the area. The furniture was selected by a group of teens, from our Young Adult Advisory Board (YAAB), guided by our Young Adult Services Librarian, Leslie Costello. We also purchased additional shelving to accommodate the growing Young Adult collection.

Additional shelving was also purchased for our children's room. This shelving helped better define the area. There is now a division between the preschool and school age children areas in the children's room. The change was generally welcomed by both groups.

In October, we went to town meeting to request funding for a CCTV Security System. The funding was approved and the system was installed in January of 2010.

Long Range Plan

In October 2009, the library submitted its 5 year long range plan to the Massachusetts Board of Library Commissioners (MBLC). The Long Range Plan was developed by a committee that included the library director, youth services librarian, 2 library trustees and a community member. The committee based much of the plan on the results of a community survey that was conducted in May of 2009.

General Statistics

As has been widely publicized recently, libraries have become busier places in times of economic downturns, and the Bellingham Library is no exception. Even though we are open 7 less hours per week, many of the core services have not seen a decrease in use.

Users

- The number of cardholders has increased 3%; more than half of town residents have a library card.
- The library had over 104,000 visitors in 2009, the second consecutive year visits have passed 100,000. Although the number is down 6% from 2008, with our reduced hours, we are serving more people per hour than we did in 2008. We are still averaging close to 400 visitors per day.
- Circulation of library materials is up 6% to 140,777 items in the calendar year.
- Patron access of state funded online reference databases at home or at the library, has increased 30% in 2009.
- The community room use is down 7%. We close at 6 pm on two nights so there are fewer nights available for the room to be used.
- Our library website use is up 10%; people are coming to the site to access the online catalog, calendar and library resources.
- The number of reference questions is up 11%, which is impressive considering we are open 7 less hours per week.
- The use of our public internet stations is down 9% but we are open 13% fewer hours, so the use when we are open has increased. Although we have no statistics, every day we see more and more people using the library's free wireless Internet on their own laptops and other wireless devices.
- Attendance at children's programs is down 3%. To best utilize staff time, we have reduced the number of children's programs offered, but attendance at individual programs has increased.
- Attendance at young adult programs is up 12% even though the number of programs has been reduced by 28%.

Staffing

- Total staff hours are down 13%, which is equal to the 13% less hours we are open this fiscal year.
- Part time staff hours are down 45% from last year.
- Volunteer hours are up 55%.

Collection

- The size of the library collection has increased by 1%.

Overall, the library has managed to maintain excellent services for the residents of the town, given the economic challenges with which it was presented.

CMRLS, CW/MARS and MBLC Affiliations

Integral to the services we provide are agencies with which the library is affiliated.

The Central Massachusetts Regional Library System (CMRLS) provides access to online databases that our patrons can access from home or in the library. These databases provide access to magazine, journal, newspaper, and reference source materials. The benefit of these databases is that they are known reliable sources to which we can refer patrons doing research for educational, information or recreational purposes. CMRLS also provides the delivery of library materials. Through their services, between 1,300 and 1,800 items per month are shared between Bellingham and other libraries. Through the delivery system, if a Bellingham patron requests a book that the Bellingham Library either does not own or our copy is not available, the book is received, usually within a couple of days, from one of hundreds of other libraries in the shared database. Due to state budget cuts, the Massachusetts regional library systems are in the process of being consolidated. It is anticipated that by July 2010, the current six regions will be reorganized and streamlined into fewer regions offering services to an expanded geographic area. We are unsure of how this will affect library services after July 2010.

The Central/Western Automated Resource Sharing (CW/MARS) is our library network. The annual dues we pay to CW/MARS funds our use of the shared database that facilitates the sharing of library materials among member libraries. CW/MARS also provides our computer network for both staff and public access computing and access to a select number of research databases.

The Massachusetts Board of Library Commissioners (MBLC) is the state agency that supports, improves and promotes library services in the Commonwealth. The MBLC certifies that libraries meet standards in order to be eligible for state aid and Library Services & Technology Act federal grants. These standards include a variety of metrics, such as the number of hours the library is open, the education level of staff and funds spent on library materials.

The 10.4% budget cut prevented the library from meeting the Massachusetts Board of Library Commissioner's (MBLC) Municipal Appropriation Requirement (MAR). The MAR requirement states:

“Public libraries are required to meet certain spending levels each year in order to receive state aid. Under the current system, a municipality must fund its library at 2.5% above the average preceding three years budgeted amounts. This is in order to provide balanced funding responsibilities within inter-library loan programs and continuity of library services from year to year. If a library cannot meet this requirement, it may petition for a one year waiver from the Board of Library Commissioners...”

In the fall we completed our state aid application and the waiver application. MBLC waiver applications were considered at the January 7, 2010 MBLC Board Meeting. After considering the waiver applications on January 7th, the Commissioners will vote to grant or deny waivers at their meeting on February 4, 2010. All indications are that since our cut was not disproportionate to the rest of the town budget, the waiver should be granted. Once the waiver is granted, we will be eligible for state aid.

2009 at the Library

Throughout the year the Bellingham Library has provided free wireless **Internet access** for patrons. This service is being used more and more on a daily basis by patrons using their own laptops and wireless devices to access library services, their own email and the Internet. In addition, the wireless service is available to groups that use our Community Room to make presentations, and conduct educational seminars and workshops.

The library has continued to be a gathering place for numerous community groups. In 2009 our **Community Room** hosted groups from all aspects of the community, including the Town of Bellingham, Boy and Girl Scout groups, sports groups of all ages, the Bellingham Arts Center and Cultural Council, local businesses and business groups, school groups, Mom's clubs, playgroups, home schooling groups, the Polish Conversation Group, ten different condo associations, and the Bellingham Crafters. The room was used 7% less in 2009 than 2008, but we are open 50% less nights than we were last fiscal year.

Library staff worked hard to gather **publicity** to promote our programs and services. Each month we submit an article to the Bellingham Bulletin, Country Gazette and Woonsocket Call, and send updates to the Community Bulletin Board on Cable 8, the local cable television station, to keep the community apprised of library events. The Bellingham Bulletin does a wonderful job of covering library events. In addition to the upcoming event schedule that we provide to them on a monthly basis, their reporters are proactive in covering library sponsored programming and events. The library distributes monthly informational flyers along with the monthly calendar. We began distributing the flyer and calendar on a monthly basis not only in the library, but on the library website and through an email sign up with our "Google Group." The library also published a newsletter in the spring of 2009 that was distributed to every home in Bellingham in the Bellingham Bulletin. Due to the cost, we suspended the newsletter distribution in the Bulletin for the fall of 2009. In mid-2009 the library created two Facebook pages; one for the Teen Zone and the other to publicize library programs. The two pages have a total of 164 fans.

In July of 2009 the library installed PC Reservation, time and print management software for our **public workstations**. This software has been essential in aiding us in keeping up with demand for public Internet use, with a minimal need for staff intervention. This has been helpful since our staff hours were reduced. Members of the public with an active library card can self log-on to a computer. The system is also connected to a state-of-the-art color copier/printer which permits self service printing. The printer is attached to a coin box. This system has eliminated waste of paper and is insuring that patrons pay for what they print.

The librarians and library staff continued their **professional development** by attending workshops held by CMRLS and CW/MARS. In addition, numerous staff members attended annual conferences of the Massachusetts Library Association and the New England Library Association. Bernadette Rivard, Library Director and Leslianne Costello, Young Adult Services Librarian participated in a Massachusetts Library Leadership Conference focusing on preparing the next generation of library leaders. Bernadette Rivard, the library director, serves on the CMRLS Continuing Education Committee and is the Treasurer of the Massachusetts Library Association.

Two mandatory **state reports** were submitted in 2009. The Annual Report Information Survey (ARIS) was sent in mid-August; the State Aid Application was sent in October. These reports make the library eligible to receive state aid and grant funding from the MBLC. As noted above, the library has applied for a waiver to be eligible to receive state aid.

In 2009 *The Friends of the Library* funded programs, activities, museum passes, and part of the cost of the remodeling the Children's Program Room. The Friends of the Library funded \$4,972.41 for costs of programming; \$4,485.00 in museum passes; \$1520.00 for the copier lease; and \$2,390.00 for the renovation of the Children's Program Room. Without this funding, many of the wonderful programs we offer to the community would not be possible. We thank the members of the Friends for their hard work raising funds for the library year-round.

In 2009 the library expanded its *volunteer program*. We now have an average of 9 volunteers who provide an average of 88 hours per month of service to the library. This is up from 4 volunteers who provided 39 hours in 2008. We have a total of 12 volunteers; seven volunteers who work through the town's senior tax write off program and five other community volunteers. In this time of increased demand for our services, having reliable volunteers enables our staff to concentrate on library projects requiring specific skill or knowledge, and allowing our volunteers to contribute to the smooth running of the library.

Adult Programming

In 2009 the library hosted *lectures* on topics including: the switch to digital TV; two lectures from the Better Business Bureau on Scams & Frauds and Identity Theft; and a lecture from Ameriprise Financial on Retirement Planning.

In 2009 we saw a surge in the demand for assistance with resume writing, *job searching* and job applications. In early 2009, to respond to the demand the library director facilitated two workshops on "Searching for Jobs on the Internet." Over 30 people attended and one of the sessions was filmed by Cable Access and shown on Cable 8.

We promoted reading with three *author events*: David Brody, author of Cabal of the Westford Knight and three other works of fiction presented a lecture on his publications. We hosted two events with local author Jeff Belanger, one of the leading authors and experts on the paranormal, ghosts, and the supernatural.

We hosted community events including a National Library Week Open House Breakfast. And, on Saturday, September 20th members of the library community met at the library to commemorate the *20th anniversary* of the opening of the Blackstone Street library location. People perused through library scrapbooks, reminisced about library history and even identified some people in photographs who had not yet been identified. During 2010 the library will be making a permanent display in the community room of photographs outlining the history of the Bellingham Library.

Every month our Reference Librarian, Cecily Christensen, hosts a book discussion group that has between 8 and 12 participants.

Numerous times throughout the year library staff served distance-learning college students as proctors for their tests and exams. In 2009, as we do every year, the library was the local facility where community members could pick up state and federal tax forms.

In October of 2009 the library was awarded an "On the Same Page" federal LSTA grant administered by the MBLC. This \$7,500 grant is to administer our "*One Book, One Bellingham*" community read. The grant hopes to cultivate a culture of reading and discussion in Bellingham by bringing our community together around one great book. The title chosen for the program is "The Soloist" by Steve Lopez. The library has 17 events planned for the "One Book, One Bellingham" program, running from February through April 2010.

In December of 2009 the library was awarded a \$1,000 mini-grant by the Central Massachusetts Regional Library System. These funds will be used to purchase kits on a variety of topics to support classroom teachers and home schooling families.

Staff Services

Due to budget constraints, as of July 1st, our Reference Librarian, Cecily Christensen's hours were decreased by 3. We had added those hours last fiscal year to enhance the service offered for homework help in the after school hours. Even with the reduction of hours, reference questions are up an additional 11% from last year's surprising 81% increase. Cecily is on the reference desk 22 hours per week providing top-notch reference and information services to the patrons of the Bellingham Public Library.

As mentioned in the Adult Programming section, we had a remarkable increase in demand for assistance with *job searching*. We found that many patrons needed assistance in setting up email accounts so that they could apply for jobs online. Many retailers and other service industry employers no longer accept paper applications; the only way to apply for these jobs is online. Patrons without Internet access or experience often come to the library for assistance in applying for jobs. To assist job searchers with current resources, we purchased new materials on resume and cover letter writing, job searching, and changing careers.

Our Circulation Staff is the backbone of the daily operation of the library. Their exceptional customer service skills keep the library operating on a smooth basis every day. Whether it is answering phone calls, assisting patrons in locating library materials, working the check out desk or maintaining order in the library, the value of their contribution cannot be overestimated. Since July we have faced additional challenges due to budget constraints that resulted in the loss of part time staff and staff hours. To their credit, the library staff has stepped up and continues to offer exceptional customer service every day.

Children's Services

Children's programming continues to be the library's most well attended, and in demand service. Nearly every day Nina Hunt, our Youth Services Librarian, has events planned for children of all ages. Programming in 2009 included two to three weekly sessions of *Ring-A-Ding-A-Sing Thing*. It is our most popular program, which has attracted as many as 90 people with an average of 40 people attending each session. In the first half of the year, before staff reductions, we also offered Rhythm & Rhyme time story time periodically. Nina has also offered 5 week courses for home schooling families, family fun time activities, craft and cooking programs, and interactive movie days.

Every holiday or special event, usually at least once a week, the library holds a craft making event for children, often as part of a party to celebrate the holiday or event. Some of the craft events are gift making sessions for children to make gifts for parents, grandparents, or siblings.

In June of 2009, Nina Hunt visited the elementary schools in town to promote the library's *Summer Reading Program*. The theme for this year's summer reading program was "Space." Throughout the summer, to support our effort to increase summer reading by children, the library offered many events to encourage summer reading.

The summer kicked off with an early July appearance by Keith Michael Johnson, Bubble Artist. Throughout the summer other events were held, including: Space Crafts, Kids Video & Board Games, Skyteller Storytime, Bubble Blowing, Creature Teachers, Chalk Drawing, Mr. DJs Hollywood Quiz Show,

Frisbee Golf, and the screening of movies with space themes - Space Jam, Muppets in Space, The Jetsons, and The Cat from Outer Space.

Young Adult Services

Attendance at our Young Adult Programming also increased during 2009. With the support of funds from an LSTA “Teens & Tweens” grant, the library was able to offer after school support services to the middle and high school students of Bellingham. Every Monday through Thursday, when school is in session, the Community Room was transformed into “**Teen Zone**,” a supervised after school program where there are numerous activities for middle and high school student participation. Not only is there homework help, a place to socialize with friends and a supportive environment, there is fun! Funding from the grant enabled the library to purchase video game equipment. We now have an XBOX, Wii and Playstation 2 for the teens to play fun, educational and competitive games.

In addition to the regular after school programs, Leslieanne Costello, our Young Adult Services Librarian, has offered numerous other programs of interest to these middle and high schoolers. These included: Teens Write Now Writing Workshop, Super Smash League Tournaments, Guitar Hero Tournaments, Pizza and Game Night @ Whole Foods, Free Comic Book Day (courtesy of Friendly Neighborhood Comics), Teen & Tween Gaming Days, a lecture on Censorship & Comic Books, Teen Cooking Class, and a Make Your Own Ice Cream Party. Movie night screenings included Speak, Grease, and Wall-E. The Teen Movie night screening of Nick & Norah’s Infinite Playlist and Inkheart included book discussion groups about the books the movies were based on.

In addition, the library has a Young Adult Advisory Board, a group of teens who meet monthly to participate in decision making not only for the focus of the “Teen Zone” program, but also to assist with selection of library materials that are of interest to teens.

In closing, the Library Director, Library Staff and Library Trustees wish to thank the community for its continued support of the library, even in these tough fiscal times. To quote Lady Bird Johnson, “Perhaps no place in any community is so totally democratic as the town library. The only entrance requirement is interest.” We are proud to be that place and it is our pleasure to serve you!

Respectfully submitted,



Bernadette Rivard, Library Director
Suzanne Garten, Chair
Russell Lafond, Vice Chair
Michael Carr,
Lisa Cavossa
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