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## Library reaches far beyond books to music, film and more

Vancouver Sun, *The Sun's Guide to Living Wisely*

Denise Ryan

For anyone hooked on Google for information, Blockbuster for DVDs and Amazon for books delivered to the door, using your local library may seem a quaint idea -- like going back to elementary school, or visiting the house you grew up in to see how small its rooms look.

But libraries aren't just books any more, and a return to library use may be just what we need to shave a few line items off the budget.

Libraries are booming, partly because what they offer now is "far beyond books," said Ross Bliss, manager of lending services and popular reading at the Vancouver Public Library.

Major jumps in circulation over the last 10 years attest to the fact that libraries are more than keeping up with contemporary tastes. Circulation of books is up 24 per cent, juvenile lit is up 52 per cent and audio-visual materials have jumped up 106 per cent.

"We also have circulating magazines, current and past issues, and a vast collection of reference magazines, music CDs, spoken word, audio books, many of them in mp3 formats, language-learning kits, popular films, and instructional DVDs," Bliss said.

What many people still don't know, he said, is how incredibly easy and convenient the Internet has made public library access.

"The catalogues for all these things are all available online at [www.vpl.ca](http://www.vpl.ca)," Bliss said. In addition, each library card holder has 50 free reserves a year, and whatever you order will be delivered to the library of your choice.

When you want to return something you can drop it off at any branch.

Not only that, Bliss said, but through the website you can access the library's most "unsung treasure," access to thousands of magazines worldwide.

"You get the full text and full indexing for thousands of magazines, every issue, every article is indexed and almost all of them are full text. You can read them onscreen, download them, print them. This is proprietary stuff, it's not free to the whole world, but if you have a Vancouver library card, you can log on from anywhere in the world.

"Say you like *Guitar Player* for example, you can go online and read every issue. Or you want to research a digital camera, you can read everything that's been published about a particular model in photography magazines."

If you want to set up a book club, the library system provides sets of books for loaning out. The sets are handed over in a tote bag, with guidelines, a set of instructions and frequently asked questions.

"Again, you can do it online, and the books would be sent to your local library," Bliss said.



CREDIT: Ian Lindsay, Vancouver Sun

Ross Bliss, Vancouver Public Library manager of lending services and popular reading, surveys the many DVD and CD titles waiting to be checked out.

The VPL offers books in more than a dozen languages, and bases its multilingual collections on local demographics.

Bliss is also excited about the VPL's genealogy data base.

The VPL subscribes to the library edition of ancestry.com, and it is available to users online. "It's a crazy resource for doing genealogical research, just fantastic, but very expensive for an individual to subscribe to," Bliss said. The library also offers the very popular Chinese Genealogy Wiki.

The search interface on the website is easy to use. Simply log in with your library card from home, request the first available copy if you want a film or book, and type in which branch you'd like to have it delivered to.

There are good reasons to make the trek to your library too. In addition to reading programs for all ages, there are musical performances, lectures and entertainment.

"It's a place to socialize," Bliss said. "It's a place to relax, there are activated spaces, quiet spaces and spaces for community use. You can even bring your coffee, as long as it has a lid."

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#### DO IT ONLINE

At [vpl.ca](http://vpl.ca) you can:

- Access library information pages in English, Chinese, Japanese, French, Korean, Spanish and Vietnamese.
- Read international newspapers and magazines.
- Search and request popular movies and books.
- Trace your family's genealogy
- Read e-books online.

## **Libraries important during economic uncertainty**

Prince George Citizen, Thursday, December 11, 2008

By John Shepherd

A friend of mine mailed me a book titled, "The Most Beautiful Libraries of the World" as a Christmas present. Of the libraries mentioned, I had the privilege to visit three of them - Library of Congress, New York Public Library and Trinity College Library in Dublin. Our community is blessed with college, university and public libraries, something we take for granted. As a former employee with Community Futures in Cranbrook, I learned the crucial role played by libraries in economic and community development when our society's boundaries expanded to encompass the southeast corner of our province. We quickly discovered that the library collections in communities such as Golden and Elkford are very limited. Preparing a realistic and detailed business plan requires a lot of information, most unavailable from local sources. In response, we started a regional business lending library that people could access through their local chambers of commerce.

Public libraries are invaluable during economic downturns. The unemployed can explore career options, track down job openings and visit employer websites on the Internet. New business owners can read how-to books on a wide variety of subjects. Librarians, who are professional researchers, can assist residents in tracking down and making sense of information.

Public libraries serve an incredibly diverse range of clients. Young mothers sign out dozens of children's books to read to their kids. People look up technical manuals for their vehicle models before attempting auto repairs. People read about ancient history, gardening in northern climates or vacation destinations. Others sign out a graphic novel or a video for the weekend.

Public libraries are people magnets and can play an important role in downtown and neighbourhood development. Nearly 1,000 people a day visit the downtown branch, one of the most frequently visited places in our city.

Public libraries are community enablers, places of personal empowerment and self help. Best of all, there are no fees, which allow everyone to use their services, regardless of background and personal means.

-- John Shepherd, Prince George



October 29, 2008

### **ALA seeks \$100 million in stimulus funding as U.S. libraries face critical cutbacks, closures**

The American Library Association (ALA) is asking Congress for \$100 million in stimulus funding to aid the nation's working families during the current economic crisis. Aid is sought to stem the bleeding of critical library services that help Americans with job searches, small business development, financial literacy and other essential assistance in hard economic times.

Public libraries are facing the most severe cutbacks in decades as budget shortfalls hit cities, towns and rural areas across the country, according to the association. From Los Angeles to Boston, libraries are cutting hours and services; some are even facing the threat of closure at a time when their support is needed most.

ALA's recommendation comes as Congress holds hearings this week on economic growth and job creation, including a Joint Economic Committee Hearing tomorrow.

Public libraries depend heavily on local property taxes to maintain operations. Across the country increased foreclosure rates, lower home values and fewer sales have sharply reduced available funds, forcing libraries to cut services and hours.

"America's free public libraries provide a lifeline for citizens in need across the country," said ALA President Jim Rettig. "Ensuring Internet access, career workshops, business seminars and other economic support services are vital links in the nation's financial recovery. This is no time to cut much-needed support, reduce hours or close library doors."

Rettig pointed to a recent ALA study showing that 73 percent of all libraries nationwide provide the only free Internet access in their communities. In rural areas the rate rises to 83 percent, according to the 2007-2008 report on public library funding and technology access. Many libraries are reporting double-digit growth in computer use this year, he said.

The National League of Cities recently estimated that a 3.6 percent decline in property tax revenues is likely to affect city budgets until 2010. In response to these budget shortfalls, libraries are being forced to cut back on hours or even close neighborhood branches.

The Trenton, NJ, public library will close its four branches and lose about half of its 57 employees by Nov. 1. The city of Milwaukee is considering closing two of its 12 branch libraries. In Newton, MA, outside of Boston, four branch libraries closed this summer; four others in nearby areas also closed or are on the chopping block.

Many cities are choosing between cutting staff and reducing hours. Others, such as Fort Worth, TX, are looking at both, with proposed cuts of more than 100 library jobs along with reduced hours. The city is facing an estimated annual shortfall of more than \$20 million. Additionally, a number of communities are also facing shorter hours and fewer days of operation in Florida.

ALA's recommendation for stimulus funding seeks support for basic library services across the country as well as specialized assistance to help Americans deal with the current economic crisis. In particular, funds are being requested to:

- Expand critical employment activities and services such as resume development, job bank web searches and career planning workshops;
- Reinstate or supplement evening and weekend hours of operation at libraries to provide the greatest possible access to services;
- Promote financial literacy, housing counseling and small business development assistance; and
- Acquire additional resources and materials to help keep up with increased demand for economic services nationwide.

Investments in libraries often yield high dividends for communities. Studies show economic returns from salaries and wages paid to staff, construction costs, employment services and library purchases. A recent Pennsylvania study points out that for every dollar invested in the public library, the community receives a return of \$5.50. A similar report from Florida shows a \$6.54 return on investment.

“Economic studies demonstrate the positive impact of spending in local communities,” said Joe Matthews, an internationally recognized expert on library management with an MBA degree from the University of California, Irvine.

“Known as the multiplier effect, every dollar spent in the community will ripple through the economy with an impact ranging from 7 to 11 times the initial spending,” he added. “The proposed stimulus spending for America’s public libraries will have an enormous impact on local economies, helping communities across the country get back on track financially.” Matthews is an acclaimed author and professor at San Jose State University.

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### **Branch Closings and Budget Cuts Threaten Libraries Nationwide**

City governments across the United States prepared in early November to slash public library budgets in the wake of revenue shortfalls and dire economic news. Even if the lame-duck Congress passes an additional economic stimulus package when it returns from recess the week leading up to Thanksgiving—an increasingly unlikely outcome, according to House Majority Leader Steny Hoyer (D-Md.)—funding is unlikely to find its way to local coffers in time to make a difference.

In a grim November 6 speech in which he called for sweeping job cuts and service reductions in many city departments, Philadelphia Mayor Michael Nutter announced the permanent closing of 11 out of 54 library branches and the elimination of Sunday hours at the three regional branches. “Make no mistake,” Nutter said as he unveiled his plan to bridge a five-year, \$1-billion budget gap. “This will be a mid-year revision of epic proportions, and because this recession may linger beyond next year, we can’t look for brief, one-time changes.”

The library cuts took many residents by surprise, because Nutter, as a city councilman in 2005, played a decisive role in blocking the Free Library of Philadelphia from reducing branch hours and laying off staff during a similar budget crunch. But Nutter told the Philadelphia *Metro* newspaper that closing libraries is something he never dreamed he’d have to do. “I grew up in the Cobbs Creek branch,” he said. “[And] one of the happiest days in my daughter Olivia’s life [is] when I took her to the Central branch to get her library card. She still talks about it.”

FLP President and Director Siobhan Reardon told *American Libraries* that the branches would close no later than January 16. “The buildings that are city owned will be turned back to the city’s department of public property,” she said. “All of the library’s assets—staff, technology, materials, and equipment—will be redeployed to nearby libraries that are large enough to handle the additional resources.” She indicated that the library senior staff had chosen which branches to close, based on circulation, building condition, and proximity to other facilities, and the board of trustees approved the plan.

Pink slips will be issued to as many as 70 library employees in early December, Reardon said, although she hoped to reduce that number by not filling even more than the 41 open positions already slated for attrition. “My hope is that as dollars return to the system, we will be able to add staff to the remaining branches and expand our outreach efforts, which are more tied to the community than library buildings.”

Amy Dougherty, executive director of the Friends of the Free Library, told *AL* that library advocates were planning 11 rallies before Thanksgiving to protest the closings, as well as the 20% reduction in the library budget over the next two years. “We’re not going to take this quietly,” she said. “We will be reaching out to federal, state, and local lawmakers to discuss options.”

### **Library distress elsewhere**

San Diego Mayor Jerry Sanders has proposed temporarily shuttering seven library branches—including Ocean Beach, one of the city’s oldest—to close a \$43-million budget deficit, the *San Diego Union-Tribune* reported November 6. The San Diego board of library commissioners unanimously voted to oppose the move November 5, and quoted statistics showing that circulation had risen by 8% in the past three months.

Judith Harris, chair of the San Diego Public Library Foundation, told reporters, “All San Diegans are suffering from the current economic woes, and cutting their free support system will leave them feeling further abandoned by

their elected officials." The city council was scheduled to discuss the library closures in public hearings November 12 and 19.

New York Public Library hours could also be on the chopping block, according to a tentative financial plan announced November 5 by Mayor Michael R. Bloomberg. Revenues have "started to fall off the cliff," Bloomberg warned. Among his proposed remedial measures are a 2.5% cut in subsidies to libraries and cultural institutions this year and 5% next year, the *New York Times* reported November 5, resulting in an average reduction of days open per week in the branches from 6 to 5.5.

The Hawaii Board of Education recommended a 10% cut in the budget of the state's only public library system October 24. The reduction is less than what Gov. Linda Lingle asked for, according to the October 27 *Honolulu Star-Bulletin*, but even with \$3 million less to work with, all 51 libraries will be able to stay open. Lingle's requested 15% cut would have forced up to six branches to close. New acquisitions and program budgets will suffer and a hiring freeze will leave 57 vacancies unfilled, CBS affiliate KGMB-TV reported October 24. Wailuku Branch Manager Susan Werner said in the October 22 *Maui News* that her library's circulation in September was 48.9% greater than a year ago. "The economy might have something to do with that," she added.

Ohio library budgets are growing lean in an uncertain economy due to a new library funding formula introduced by Gov. Ted Strickland in 2007 that guarantees libraries 2.2% of the state's general tax revenue. In rural Paulding County, the Carnegie Library was forced to ask for a .65-mil levy in November for the first time in its 90 years of operation. The ballot was defeated by roughly 53% to 47%, Director Susan Pieper told *AL*. Now, the board faces cutting branch hours and eliminating Saturday service altogether, as well as drastic reductions in the book and DVD budget, raising fees for copies and faxes, and cutting staff paychecks by five hours per week.

"This will mean that even I will take a \$6,000-a-year cut," Pieper said. "We may put the levy back on in February. Otherwise, times certainly look bleak. I pray Congress passes a stimulus package for libraries and that those funds would be made available to the rural libraries that need it so desperately."

In other areas:

- Phoenix (Ariz.) Public Library may shut down for one day each week and slash its acquisition fund, according to a budget proposal to be released by the city January 6.
- A \$1.2-million budget shortfall at the Fort Vancouver (Wash.) Regional Library District could mean closing a well-used mall branch or cutting back hours at all its facilities in 2009.
- Even the Chicago Public Library, which benefited from the 2007 passage of an \$83.4-million property-tax increase to augment its budget, will double its fines for the first time since 1991, from 10 cents to 20 cents a day with a \$10 ceiling. "We collected \$1.2 million in fees and fines last year," CPL Commissioner Mary Dempsey said in the October 28 *Chicago Sun-Times*, "We anticipate, under this proposal, an additional \$1.6 million."

The American Library Association has asked Congress to include \$100 million for libraries as part of any stimulus package it considers. In an October 29 letter to two Senators and two Representatives on the Joint Economic Committee, ALA President Jim Rettig wrote, "Simply put, libraries provide our communities with free services that will help our unemployed find jobs and stimulate our economy." But many other organizations are competing for a piece of the same stimulus pie that could include tens of billions in unemployment insurance benefits, food stamps, and aid to the states for infrastructure and transportation spending.

Despite President-elect Barack Obama's November 7 call for a "stimulus package sooner rather than later," relief may have to wait until the 111th Congress takes office. Rep. Hoyer said in *The Hill* November 7 that the Bush administration has balked at some proposals, and "Clearly there's no point in us doing something if the administration is going to take the position that they're not going to sign something."



December 4, 2008

**ALA: Obama's concern over closures demonstrates understanding of libraries' role in economy**

WASHINGTON – The American Library Association (ALA) today applauds President-elect Barack Obama for recognizing the effect library closings have on communities during a meeting with the National Governors Association.

Obama, discussing potential budget shortfalls for the 41 states represented during the meeting, cited library closures as one of the drastic measures already being taken to balance state budgets.

Emily Sheketoff, Executive Director of the ALA Washington Office, said it is critical for governors and members of Congress to understand how public libraries can help get the economy back on its feet, and President-elect Obama's comments today served as a reminder of the importance of keeping libraries open during this time of economic hardship.

"Public libraries stand ready to help communities recover from this economic tailspin," Sheketoff said. "Governors and mayors need to make sure that the funding for these multi-purpose economic engines is in place."

Currently, 73 percent of all libraries nationwide report that they are the only provider of free Internet access in their communities. In rural areas, the role of the public library is even more critical, as 83 percent of libraries are the only free Internet provider.

Sheketoff said libraries also help Americans get jobs by providing services such as skills assessment, resume preparation, information technology training, small-business development classes and much more.

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