

Common Library Misconceptions

All known evidence points to the conclusion that the history of the private and public library begins in ancient Greece from at least as early as the 6th century. Since its conception, public libraries have had to continuously evolve to meet the ever changing needs of their clients. As we move further into the 21st century, the changes libraries face have never been greater. As prevalent as change is to libraries, so are several misconceptions about public libraries in general, the role within the community, and the people who dedicate themselves to serving their communities. By shedding light on some of these common misconceptions, our hope is to introduce you to your local public library as it stands in the 21st century.

MYTH NUMBER 1

The library only has books.

FACT: Simply providing books has long been a thing of the past for libraries. At the Brockville Public Library we have been offering FREE High-Speed Internet Access since 1996. Since then we have added free wireless access, and have access to hundreds of online databases. In addition to regular print books we also offer alternative formats such as large print and talking books on cassette and CD. Currently we have a collection of over 650 popular movies in DVD format, most of which are new releases, and over 1400 titles on VHS. We also have an extensive music collection, many popular magazine subscriptions, and seven different newspapers. Every year we offer more and more library programs geared towards children, teens, adults, and seniors and range from author visits to flower arranging workshops and from travel slideshow presentations to visits from shamans. We also offer a number of services such as Reference, Interlibrary Loan, library service to shut-ins, free one-on-one Internet and computer training, as well as free Word processing, to name but just a few.

MYTH NUMBER 2

Libraries are Quiet and Restful Places of Work

FACT: A commonly-held idea is that libraries are quiet, tomb-like places of restful reflection and serious study and that those working in them, are introverted and strive to maintain this tomb-like atmosphere. Both of these statements are far from the reality. The Brockville Library is a busy, active place (we average about 500 visits a day) where members of our community come for a wide variety of reasons. You have only to experience the boisterous activity in a children's story hour, observe the steady flow of students using the reference desk, or the animated discussions in our newspaper area to realize that a large part of a library visit is, in fact, the interaction with others.

MYTH NUMBER 3

The Internet will make libraries obsolete.

FACT: On the contrary, the Internet explosion has drawn more people INTO LIBRARIES for access to computers, training and common-sense help to sort through the overwhelming mountain of information---good and bad---available on the Internet. Additionally, electronic access (even to full texts) has stimulated book borrowing, browsing, and use of printed reference material. The whole world is moving toward an information economy and the information business is booming. At the moment all its segments, including public libraries, are benefiting. As for fiction materials, everyone always wants to have a good book on hand!

MYTH NUMBER 4

Library service is free.

FACT: Library service appears to be free, but is in fact funded by several levels of government including municipal government, which in turn, is funded by taxpayers. Currently \$55 of your total household taxes go towards supporting the Brockville Library. For our out-of-town residents, there is an equivalent \$55 per year per household, membership fee. If you do live out of town and have been deterred by the \$55/year membership fee you may wish to use the "Library Value Calculator" to see how much you would have to pay out-of-pocket for your library services. This calculator will be available on our website soon, but can currently be found at www.newmarketpl.ca/librarycalculator.php. Or, put more simply, in order to get full value for your \$55 investment, you would only need to do one of the following in a one year period:

Sign out 9 videos ~ Sign out 3 adult fiction new releases ~ Sign out 1 ½ talking books
Ask us 6 reference questions ~ Sign out 4 music CD's

MYTH NUMBER 5

“Librarians” Like Rules

FACT: Another common misperception is that librarians, or library staff are rule-bound individuals who take great glee in shushing library users and enforcing rules. In actual fact, librarians are in the business of public service, and often need to think in new and innovative ways in order to best serve the clients of their libraries. Although libraries have policies that need to be respected (such as policies relating to overdue materials and Internet usage), librarians only enforce these policies to promote fair and equitable access to, and use of, the library for all patrons.

MYTH NUMBER 6

Anybody Can Work as an Information Professional/Everyone who works in a library is a Librarian

FACT: Individuals working in any library come from diverse backgrounds with differing levels of education and occupy different roles within the library setting. This holds true at the Brockville Library as well. Most of the members of our staff have some degree of training/education in the library field. There are three main levels of library training that our library staff possess. The first is the EXCEL diploma (not to be confused with the Office Excel program) which is geared towards individuals who are already working in a library setting. The courses are designed to provide an opportunity to upgrade library skills and management techniques. The second is the college-based Library Technician Program which trains individuals to help acquire, prepare, and organize materials and help users to find those materials. In today’s public libraries, library technicians are also actively involved in marketing, outreach and computer related issues. Library technicians can also transfer their skills into other non-traditional settings. Lastly, Librarians are university-educated at the graduate level which qualifies them for many different roles as an information professional. The skills and expertise learned are highly transferable, enabling them to work not only in more traditional libraries, but also in diverse areas such as web management, advancement research, information systems, knowledge management, information management, to name a few. Librarians help people find information and use it effectively for personal and professional purposes. They also, manage staff and develop and direct information programs and systems for the public and ensure that information is organized in a manner that meets users’ needs. It is the combination of these skill sets and backgrounds that make up the staff at the Brockville Library and allows us to effectively deliver service to Brockville residents.

MYTH NUMBER 7

The public library is a charitable frill, not an essential community service.

FACT: Families with children and adults learning to read, students working on assignments, a cancer victim searching for treatment information, an unemployed worker updating a resume, a small business owner tracking market trends, an elderly citizen emailing their grandchildren, a visually impaired child seeking books on CD and residents moving to Brockville specifically for its dynamic library would strongly disagree that libraries are not an essential community service.

It is our hope that by shedding some light on common misconceptions that we have broken down some of the barriers that exist. Visit us in March and take advantage of our services and collections. The children’s Spring Programs start again in April and we are offering a slideshow presentation of a three-week adventure in Honduras on Wednesday April 9 at 10:00 am. Please sign up at the Circulation Desk for this free program, as space is limited. You can also visit us at www.brockvillelibrary.ca.

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