

Book Column – May 2009

It has been observed that during economic downturns, public libraries see increased use of their services and resources. That is what we are noticing at the Brockville Public Library. Our circulation statistics are rising and we are seeing more people coming in to use our free word processing computers to prepare or update resumes; to search for employment opportunities on our free Internet computers; and to check the want ads in the *Recorder and Times*, *Ottawa Citizen*, *Globe and Mail* and *Toronto Star*. Why then are libraries always the first to be cut by municipal councils at budget time?

How can we create a vibrant city that encourages everyone's creative input? How can we encourage young people to stay and families and retirees to relocate to our city? How can we foster print and computer literacy? One obvious answer is to support arts and culture, and what better place to start than our public library.

Brockville citizens have recently been engaged in the process of creating a new vision for our city. The city's official website, www.brockville.com, quotes urban planner Richard Florida under a number of headings. Brockville is touted as being well positioned for "the creative age", a term coined by Mr. Florida to describe the change he sees in our society as we move from a manufacturing-based to a knowledge-based society. In his keynote address at this year's Ontario Library Association Conference in Toronto, Mr. Florida stated that every person is blessed with creativity that can contribute toward the community's well-being; and public libraries are already part of that creative community, contributing to the economy, workforce and technological innovation.

Making the decision of where to live and work is perhaps the most important choice a person can make. According to Mr. Florida, finding a place that nurtures creativity and innovation is the key to leading a happy and fulfilled life. How can we make Brockville the first choice when people are considering what city to live in?

"Stagnant, greyer Brockville forecast" was a recent headline in the *Recorder and Times*. How depressing and misleading! It's true that our city has grown very slowly over the past few decades. But it's also true that there are more opportunities for community involvement in a small city like ours. The city website talks about broadening our talent base and harnessing the creative potential of Ontarians. Brockville Library staff knows that retirees look seriously at quality of life when considering relocating. They visit our library and ask us about our community. They write compliments in our guest book about the library building, up-to-date computer system, Internet access, great selection of new titles, and especially our helpful, friendly staff. And when they do move to Brockville many of them are keen library customers and supporters. Our retirees and seniors, both resident and newcomers, are contributing their experience, talents, skills, and energy to enriching Brockville. Just to give a few examples, they volunteer their help with our library's literacy programs; design and make beautiful quilts for orphanages in Belarus; and participate in new projects such as *Project Encore* to renovate the Brockville Arts Centre.

On the city's website under the heading *Establish New Social Safety Nets*, one proposal is that we make early childhood development a high priority by strengthening "creativity skills through our education system." The Brockville Public Library definitely plays a role in our education system. We have had a separate children's department for more than eighty years and are the first place where children can begin their personal journey to language discovery and reading. Our excellent collections, story hours, and programs offer the perfect jumping off point to learning, guided by our trained staff. We are already planning our summer reading club and programs around this year's detective theme, "Agent 009". Look for updates on our website.

One very important aspect of our library is often overlooked and that is the building itself. Our renovated Carnegie library is an accessible meeting place and an inviting space for people of all ages, cultures, educational backgrounds and economic levels. Our patrons tell us that they enjoy the peace and quiet on the second floor where we have exhibits by local artists and collectors, newspapers and magazines, not to mention the latest books. And we are a busy place! With 10,000 visitors every month we are an anchor for the downtown.

Lifelong learning is the norm nowadays and reading for pleasure continues to be a popular pursuit. Who can afford to buy all the books (in print and on CD) that are published every year? You can read two of Richard Florida's thought-provoking titles your library: *Who's your city?: how the creative economy is making where to live the most important decision of your life* (c2008) and *The rise of the creative class and how its transforming work, leisure, community, and everyday life* (c2004). Check their availability, reserve them if they are on loan, and request titles we don't have through interlibrary loan, all from your home computer. Are you looking for a volunteer opportunity? We need volunteers to work one on one with young struggling readers through our very successful summer practice reading program. Mark your calendar and plan to take advantage of the great bargains at our annual used book sale at the 1000 Islands Mall on May 29th and 30th.

If golf is your game consider participating in our first golf tournament fundraiser on Sunday July 12 at the Sunnidell Golf Course. For more details on these and other happenings, go to our website at www.brockvillelibrary.ca, visit us at 23 Buell Street located opposite the Post Office or phone 613-342-3936. Beat the economic downturn and get a library card. It's the smartest card in your wallet!

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