

Book Column – April 2010

The best gift to a community? A free public library!

What is "the best gift" you can give a community? For Andrew Carnegie, the Scottish-American businessman and millionaire, it was a public library. In 1903 he gave our town \$17,000 to build a library at the corner of Buell and George streets.

The City is asking for public input into its draft strategic plan. (A copy is available at the Library and online at <http://city.brockville.on.ca/index.cfm?ID=549>). It is disappointing that there is no mention of the Brockville Public Library in this planning document. This is puzzling because our Library is the hub of our community, and an anchor for the downtown. Our customers tell us that the Library is not their only destination. They also do banking, meet a friend for lunch, shop, visit the waterfront, go to a legal or dental appointment, buy a bottle of wine. In other words, they are supporting our local economy with their hard-earned money in downtown Brockville while also enjoying the many services of their public library.

Our Library is a very busy public space. We conduct an annual statistical survey for the Ontario government. In one week last November 2,640 people visited our library; 3,539 items circulated; 1,103 items (newspapers, books, magazines, reference materials, etc.) were used in the library; 963 people used our 11 free Internet and word processing computers; 22 people used our free wireless Internet service; and 896 electronic databases were accessed.

There are mentions of libraries in the draft official plan; for example, **Section 3.5.2 – Community Facilities, item #7** states: **"The City shall encourage the provision of libraries to provide important cultural and community resources for learning, research and community activities."**

The Brockville Public Library certainly fits under a number of sections in the city's draft plan. Under **Healthy Community #13**, there is the statement that the city will, **"ensure that all citizens have opportunities for active and healthy lifestyles through equitable, accessible, and affordable recreation and community programs."** Our Library has traditionally provided health and wellness information to anyone who needs it. Under #14 in this section, the draft plan says the city wants to, **"Conserve and enhance the historical and cultural heritage of the City"**. Our library building, one of 111 Carnegie libraries in Ontario, is part of the architectural heritage of our city. Library staff provides citizens and visitors with information about Brockville's long, rich history and the people who contributed to its many successes by means of our local history archives, newspaper files, microfilm and collections. After all, who are we without our past? We also partner with the Brockville Museum which exhibits items of historical interest at our Library.

Section 3.3.2 Positioning our economy – Tourism talks about the importance of tourism to our local economy. During the tourist season, the Brockville Public Library welcomes many foreign visitors who know we offer free Internet access to help them keep in touch with friends and family, make hotel bookings at their next stop, and so on. They ask library staff about where to eat and what they can see and do while they're here. Staff is delighted to be tourist ambassadors. In another aspect of economic development, The Library also welcomes people who visit our library when looking for the best place to spend their retirement years. We are proud that we can hold our own with much larger communities because of our user-friendly computer system, excellent collections, and our skilled staff.

Under **2.3.2.2 Objectives** on page 58 (see points 29-36) the draft plan talks about the importance of an "**Innovative and Advanced Workforce**". Our library staff is certainly an important part of that workforce. They are challenged every day to keep pace with the rapid changes in information technology and then assist the public in using it to best advantage. The comment that it's important to "**encourage and assist citizens to enhance their level of education and their skills**" falls directly under one of our Library's chief mandates in a number of ways. The Brockville Public Library supports print and computer literacy through collections in different formats; has computer literacy computers for children; offers one on one adult computer instruction through Industry Canada's CAP program; supports education at all levels both locally and by distance education; provides opportunities for online job searching and resume preparation; and supplies free Internet computers and word processing computers and wireless access. We help people, from preschoolers to octogenarians, to plot their own personal course in lifelong learning,

For over 100 years the Brockville Public Library has played a strong role in our community: in literacy and learning, innovation and prosperity. The Board, staff and volunteers at the Brockville Public Library know that our Library is a unique community resource for everyone. We are more than prepared to meet the changing information needs and technological challenges of our community in the 21st century. And yet the Brockville Public Library is not mentioned in our City's draft strategic plan.

Golf enthusiasts, please step forward! We are looking for players for our second annual golf tournament on Sunday July 11 at the Sunnidell Golf Club. We also need tee sponsors (\$150), and golf cart sponsors (\$50). For more information please phone 613-342-3936 or go to www.brockvillelibrary.ca.

We are pleased to announce some new services. Book Club Kits are now available! We have 10 kits, each containing 10 copies of a title (for example, *The Book of Negroes*) and available for loan for six weeks. Register for our next scrapbooking class on Wed. May 26 from 6 to 7 p.m. Hundreds of talking-books are available for you to download and it's free! Ask us how to access this service. How many more services does your Library offer? Visit our website at www.brockvillelibrary.ca or visit us at 23 Buell Street opposite the Post Office and find out.

"What is the best gift which can be given to a community? ... a free public library occupies the first place..."

Andrew Carnegie, 1889