

Libraries as Community Builders

As you're reading this, spring is in high gear. Baseball bats are swinging, as are children on playgrounds. This annual rebirth of earth tends to bring us back to a more youthful mindset of unadulterated pursuits. In the course of our jam-packed grown-up schedules, that childlike sense of wonder seems to awaken a bit this time of year, along with the dormant tulip bulbs.

There are several advantages to working at a library, one being the constant connection to children. They remind us of what's truly important in life, challenge us to be better people, and keep us thinking forward. We catch a glimpse of future promise in their precious, wide-eyed faces.

One of our most popular youth programs, **3 Little Birds: Music & Movement**, is a weekly highlight for staff and families alike on Friday mornings at 10:30. The program has been on hiatus as its leader, Librarian Josalyn Wilder, recovers from a debilitating injury. The temporary absence of 3 Little Birds underscores just how much families and their children value these programs providing the winning combination of learning through movement and music, often pre-preschool. Here are just a few of several sentiments shared, along with many get well wishes:

When I put my daughter down for a nap a few minutes ago, I could hear her singing your songs with her stuffed animal: "Move your feet to the beat, this is how your heart beats"....and "H-e-l-l-o, this is how we say hello! Two years old and she can already spell! Thanks again!

My granddaughter has been practicing her ukulele and is looking forward to showing you how she plays so well. At her 2nd birthday party this Sunday, she'll wish for your arm to be all better when she blows out the candles on her cake.

"My daughter uses her toys to play 3 Little Birds at home and sings the songs from class."

From several patrons: *"We bought our child rhythm sticks for her birthday because s/he loves 3 Little Birds so much!"*

"Hope you are drinking lots of milk to help with the healing process."

Josalyn painstakingly typed responses to each heartfelt message with one hand, which speaks to the amount of caring that goes both ways. And the good news is, 3 Little Birds is back Friday mornings in May! – to the delight of many. According to Josalyn, it's morphed into something more meaningful than a class. "We've created a community through this program," she exclaims. "Our space has become their destination - and that is key. Programs with the potential to make libraries community builders are worth it all!"

The 3 Little Birds program is a strong example – one of many -- why Guilderland Public Library is seeking to grow. It routinely draws 150+ people, and the storytime room was built to accommodate 40. Several children's programs are at capacity levels as the demand for excellent educational offerings soars. A major thrust of our library renewal plan involves providing more space for children to thrive socially and intellectually, well before they step foot into a school building, and throughout their formative years. We also seek a dedicated space for teens to explore and connect in a safe and welcoming environment, plus more meeting space to fulfill requests. The proposed plans by Butler Rowland Mays Architects, LLP, a local firm that specializes in library design, are based on public input and have been carefully crafted over 15 months to be cost effective and also forward-thinking.

Guilderland Public Library dates back to 1992, making it over a quarter-century old. We are currently operating well beyond our capacity. There is no room to expand our collection, meet existing and future programming needs, and offer an adequate number of quiet study and reading spaces. Here are a few 2018 stats to illustrate:

- At least 217,922 people stepped through our doors
- 513,080 items were checked out
- 755 programs had a cumulative attendance of 23,871
- 48 computers were used more than 530 times each

In addition to the clear need to expand to satisfy public demand, fundamental maintenance upgrades are also required at this juncture – things like installation of a sprinkler system, and modifications to enhance overall safety that were not envisioned in the early 1990s.

We refer to ourselves as “Guilderland’s Gathering Place”, a place where anyone is welcome - the de facto hub of the community. This was underscored recently with the outpouring of support for the Hulslander family following a devastating house fire on a weekend, as donations flooded our lobby over that weekend and beyond. It’s a privilege for us to accommodate neighborly needs such as this. We also anticipate greater foot traffic as sidewalks are installed past our packed parking lot. And we have not even touched on meeting the exponential needs of the burgeoning senior population, and the impact those ballooning demographics will have on our facility. That’s for another article.

The library renewal project will be on the ballot May 21. It is a less ambitious plan than was proposed in 2012. We plan to contribute \$1.4 million dollars to the project, and are seeking approval of just under \$7 million to move forward. **We’re holding informational meetings regarding the proposed plans with Architect Paul Mays on hand: Tues. April 16, 4:00 and 6:30 p.m., and May 2 at 6:30 p.m.** We encourage your attendance, and appreciate the opportunity to partner with you to make an even greater impact as a treasured community resource for future generations.