

Public Libraries: Places to Learn, Share and Create

At Branford's Blackstone Library, computer studios with video-editing software are available for anyone interested in filmmaking. Nearby, a local musician has designed and crafted a tuning device for a lute on a three-dimensional printer. And in another area, a bank of sewing machines is used for sewing classes. While books remain the biggest reason visitors come to Blackstone, the library offers a broad menu of other resources and programs that support the pursuit of information and knowledge.

“There’s a lot more use of the library as community gathering space ...”

*Beth Crowley,
Director, Scranton Memorial Library*



Branford's James Blackstone Memorial Library

Blackstone and other libraries throughout Greater New Haven and the country have remained relevant by evolving to meet the needs of the community. They embody the mindset promoted by “Libraries Transform,” the American Library Association’s campaign that states: “more than just quiet places to do research, find a book, and read ... libraries are centers of their communities: places to learn, create, and share.” And the public is responding with enthusiasm.

The Numbers

- Annual library visits in Greater New Haven increased by 22 percent from 2002 to 2015.¹
- 20.7 million people visited a public library in Connecticut in 2016.²
- Connecticut libraries received 5.6 visits per capita in 2016.³
- Two million people attended library programs in Connecticut in 2016.⁴

What The Community Foundation is Doing

- In 2017, The Community Foundation sponsors Inside the Box, a project which brought a replica of a solitary confinement cell to the New Haven Free Public Library. The exhibit encouraged community discussions around the effects of solitary confinement; it was made possible through a partnership with Yale Law School, United Church of Christ, the Library and others.
- A 2015 grant to the New Haven Free Public Library Foundation supports a new library service model that delivers both core and innovative services to the Dixwell/ Newhallville neighborhoods.
- In 2015, a Valley Community Foundation grant to the Derby Neck Library Association supports new furniture, repairs and renovations to the Children’s Room at the Derby Neck Library.
- A 2016 grant to the Institute Library in New Haven supports the poetry program, *The Word*.
- A 2012 grant to the New Haven Free Public Library Foundation supports the creation of a strategic plan using a Community Needs Assessment study.



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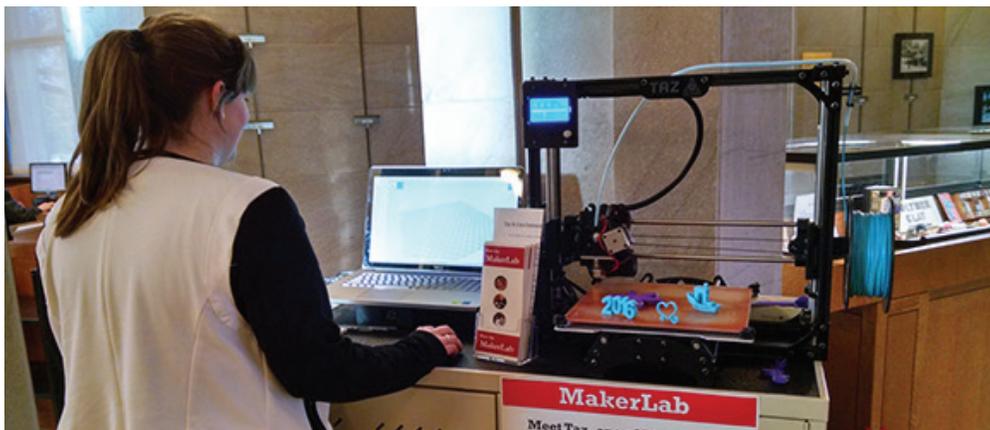
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A Community Resource

Most Americans agree that libraries are important places in the community and have the resources they need, according to the Pew Research Center's annual report on libraries.

"Libraries are one of the last remaining truly democratic and open public institutions," says New Haven Free Public Library Executive Director Martha Brogan. "To adapt a saying from one of my colleagues in another city, 'I'm not in the library business; I'm in the New Haven business.'"

Partnering with community organizations is one of the ways New Haven and libraries throughout the region are able to offer a wide selection of programs. At Ives, New Haven's downtown branch, a staff person from the local nonprofit Liberty Community Services is available six days a week to provide counseling and guidance to people needing housing services. New Haven Legal Assistance offers a clinic on naturalization and the Literacy Volunteers of Greater New Haven holds an English as a Second Language conversation group.



A visitor to Blackstone Library's MakerLab designs and creates on a 3D printer.

The library's role as a space for self-education and life-long learning has helped shape the careers of many great Americans, such as the late Pulitzer Prize-winning playwright August Wilson. Libraries throughout the region are helping to support life-long learning and skill-building for the 21st century economy by reimagining their spaces.

New Haven plans to transform part of the first floor into a creative space called Innovation Commons on the Green. The plan envisions a space that attracts entrepreneurs, designers, artists, civic leaders and inventors to develop ideas, experiment and share.

"We are the original coworking space," Brogan says.

Heavy usage of Madison's Scranton Memorial Library has the town planning to nearly double its footprint.

"There is a lot more use of the library as community gathering space and for people coming here and needing a place to work," says Library Director Beth Crowley.

The Foundation manages the endowments of several libraries in the region including:

New Haven Free Public Library Endowment

Friends of the New Haven Free Public Library Fund

Derby Public Library Endowment

Plumb Library Reserve Fund

Still a Place for Books

Libraries have been changing rapidly since the rise of the digital age. Yet, while a majority of people look to their libraries for access to free computers, broadband internet and classes in digital skills, the traditional activities of checking out printed books and finding a quiet place to read or sit remain the most popular reason for library visits.⁵

"Circulating books and leisure reading are still in high demand," says Crowley, of Madison. "You can go inside and be anonymous. You can interact with us if you want to. But librarians have a strong respect for privacy."

Sources

¹ Abraham, Mark and Mary Buchanan. (2016). Greater New Haven Community Wellbeing Index. New Haven, CT: DataHaven; 60.

² "LibGuides: Statistics for Connecticut Public Libraries: Annual Report." Annual Report - Statistics for Connecticut Public Libraries - LibGuides at Connecticut State Library, Division of Library Development. Accessed January 23, 2017. <http://libguides.ctstatelibrary.org/dld/stats/annreport>.

³ "LibGuides: Statistics for Connecticut Public Libraries: Connecticut Public Library Statistical Trends, 2001 - 2016." Connecticut Public Library Statistical Trends, 2001 - 2016 - Statistics for Connecticut Public Libraries - LibGuides at Connecticut State Library, Division of Library Development. Accessed January 23, 2017. <http://libguides.ctstatelibrary.org/dld/stats/datavisual/ctdatatrends>.

⁴ "LibGuides: Statistics for Connecticut Public Libraries: Annual Report." op.cit.

⁵ Horrigan, John B. "Libraries 2016." Pew Research Center: Internet, Science & Tech. September 09, 2016. Accessed January 23, 2017. <http://www.pewinternet.org/2016/09/09/libraries-2016/>.

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