



A special report of Multnomah County Library | www.multcolib.org

The library—helping navigate a turbulent economy

Maren Maggio is uncertain about her future.

Having just lost her job at a local hospital, she sifts through the resume and job-seeking resources on the table in front of her at Central Library while she waits for a computer terminal to open up.

“I don’t know exactly what I will do,” says Maggio, “but I have to update my resume.”

Her wait for a library computer is estimated to be under an hour—relatively short compared to many of Multnomah County Library’s busy neighborhood libraries, where wait times can be more than two hours.

With the economic downturn, library staff are on the frontline helping those struggling to get answers—how to fill out an online job application, apply for mortgage assistance, understand an investment statement, research a medical condition, or get by on less.

A stressed population lined up for help

Multnomah County Library is seeing increased demand for

nearly all it offers, from Internet access to check-outs, from storytimes to language classes.

“We are really crowded these days,” says Nancy Arvesen, a librarian at St. Johns. “Use of all of our services has gone up, especially computer and Wi-Fi usage. At times, we have difficulty finding places for people to sit.”

More people are coming to the library to research ways to economize. But many have even more fundamental needs—how to begin a job search, find financial assistance or keep from losing their home.

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Computer access can determine survival

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“We have been working with a gentleman in his 80s who was laid off. He can’t survive on his Social Security. He comes in to learn how to use a computer so he can apply for jobs,” says Hillsdale librarian Tom French. “A volunteer was able to work with him in a computer lab. His learning curve is steep, but he is determined. We are rooting for him in his job search!”

Fortunately, Hillsdale Library offers extended computer labs for job seekers, with one-on-one assistance for those who need it.

These days, the library is filled with people going online to find everything from employment resources to assistance programs and transitional housing.

“Demand for the library’s computers is high in this economy. At our busiest neighborhood libraries, wait times can be more



In the current economic climate, problem solving provided by library staff, like Central librarian Laural Winter, makes a difference.

Continued on following page



Library computers are used to access everything from homework to job help.

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than two hours,” says Vailey Oehlke, the new library director. To address demand, all libraries also offer free Wi-Fi access for those who bring their own laptops.

“Demand for the library’s computers is high in this shaky economy. At our busiest neighborhood libraries, wait times can be more than two hours,” says Vailey Oehlke, the new library director.

Coaching those in crisis

“Job seekers in this environment tell us they don’t have any other place to turn,” says librarian Alison Kastner, of her experiences at St. Johns. “I recently helped an older woman who had never used a computer. She was struggling to complete a 23-page online application for a housekeeping position at a department store. We listen, coach and encourage these days. She was so grateful for the help.”

Even for those who have been gainfully employed, happily retired or settled in to a seemingly secure family routine, the volatile climate has created an uncertain future.

Librarians describe Fridays as particularly difficult days. “People walk into the library, looking stunned, having just gotten their pink slips. Some have not looked for work in years. Sometimes, they are unable to even prioritize what they need help with,” says Kastner.

“Helping the recently homeless try to navigate their new lifestyle is the most heart-wrenching part of my job these days,” says Hollywood librarian Laura Simon.

She tells the story of one recently homeless gentleman: Having gone through a seven-month downhill slide, he has ended up

living in his car. He came to Hollywood Library one day to check out computer resources.

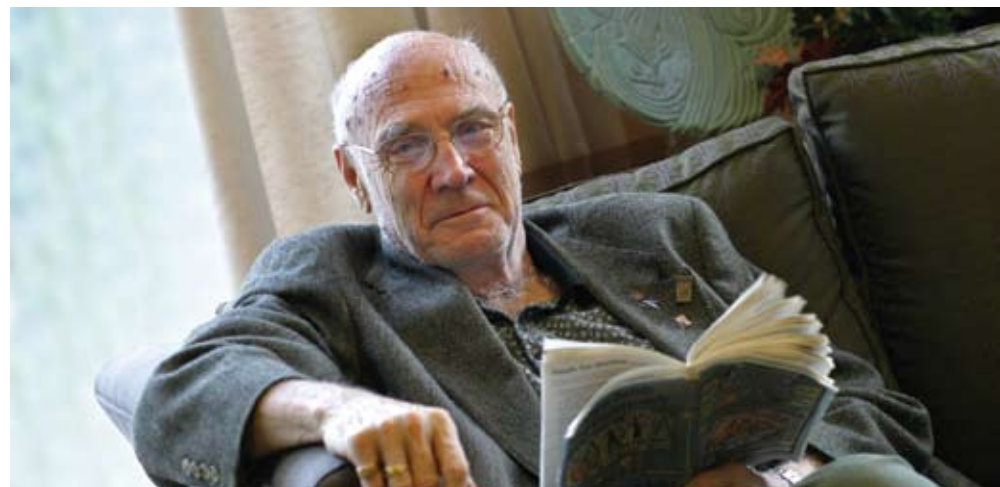
“Since that first visit, he comes in regularly,” says Simon.

Preventing isolation

Libraries ease the loneliness and isolation that come with difficult times.

Neighborhood libraries have become hubs for people dealing with uncertain futures, seeking a connection with others. Many job seekers come with their laptops in the morning and work at the library all day. “It gives them a reason to get out of bed in the morning,” says Arvesen.

Every week the library also takes books and learning opportunities to seniors, the homebound and others who cannot make it to the library. “By delivering books to people, we keep their minds active and keep them connected to the community and living in their homes,” says Jane Salisbury, director of library outreach programs. “The people you don’t see at the library are often those who benefit most from its services.”



The library keeps seniors and the homebound connected to the community.

Getting a community back on its feet

The library is one of the rare places where professional assistance is available to everyone, every day, for free.

By connecting people with the information necessary to meet their basic needs, librarians are helping people remain self-sufficient. In uncertain times, that help supports the initiative, entrepreneurship and retraining that rebuilds economies.

“Libraries are playing a crucial role in this economic recovery,” says Merris Sumrall, CEO of The Library Foundation, “because one by one, they are helping people get back on their feet.”

* Study funded by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and the American Library Association.

Building a stronger community

- 1** where Multnomah County Library ranks in circulation per capita among large urban libraries in the nation
- 58** the thousands of babies, toddlers and school children who participated in Summer Reading last year
- 866** the number of people who attend library events every day
- 2,000** the number of questions library staff answer in person, online and on the phone each day
- 150,238** the number of books delivered annually to seniors and those who can’t come to the library
- 500,000** the increase in the number of items checked out of the library during the past year
- 20,394,496** the number of books and materials circulated by Multnomah County Library last year

What a library card delivers—a sampling

From cultural outings and concerts to storytimes, art events and author visits, the library is maintaining access to arts, culture and educational activities for children and adults.

■ FOR JOB SEEKERS

- At the library** Update your resume, find resume resources and career information. Access free Wi-Fi.
- Critical help** At several neighborhood libraries, find expanded services for the unemployed, including computer labs where job seekers can spend up to three hours at the computer, with one-on-one help from a volunteer or staff member.
- Online** Identify and pursue new professional opportunities. www.multcolib.org/jobs

■ FOR STUDENTS AND TEENS

- Hitting the books** Get free homework help every day. www.multcolib.org/homework
- Think ahead** Learn about colleges and scholarships. www.multcolib.org/teens/college.html
- A place to connect** Teens lounges offer a chance to meet friends, do homework and get online. www.multcolib.org/teens/lounges.html
- No summer slump** There's no reason to lose reading skills this summer. Join in Summer Reading. www.multcolib.org/summer

■ FOR CULTURE SEEKERS

- Rotating exhibits** View touring exhibits and examples of book arts and historical collections. www.multcolib.org/events/collins
- Rare books** Discover one of the nation's best rare book collections. www.multcolib.org/about/mcl-wilson.html
- Lunch and learn** Increase your professional skills and engage in current issues over your lunch hour. www.multcolib.org/events/brownbag.html
- Our best regional writers** Hear local writers talk about their craft. www.multcolib.org/events/writers.html
- Cinema classics** Catch up on movie classics while kicking back on a Sunday. www.multcolib.org/events/cinema.html

■ FOR FAMILIES ON A BUDGET

- What to expect when you're expecting** New parents in the county, look for your package from the library about the importance of reading to your baby. www.multcolib.org/birthtosix/ecr/npg.html
- Unforgettable tales** Hear some of the community's best storytellers perform each week at storytimes for babies, toddlers, preschoolers and families. Storytelling is offered in Spanish, Chinese and Vietnamese. www.multcolib.org/events/storytime.html
- Some impressive jams** Find everything from Americana music to youngster sing-alongs.
- Compete or create** Learn chess or knitting together. www.multcolib.org/events/chess.html
www.multcolib.org/events/knitting.html





Do you know people who are struggling because of the tough economy? Make sure they have a library card and know how to use it.

Find out what's happening at the library by signing up for the library e-newsletter. www.multcolib.org/newsletter/subscribe

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