



Library offers public place for pursuing private passion

By **LISA JIMENEZ**

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Libraries have quickly become much more than a place for books, and the Silver City Public Library is no exception. Whether building a résumé and sharpening computer skills, enjoying a concert or author's discussion or just connecting to the internet, library staff and volunteers create a welcoming public space for the pursuit of personal dreams and passions.

"Libraries have a great impact on the community in a very positive way," said Ken Dayer, library director. "We are always balancing the varied needs of our customers, and helping them to pursue their interests. It's very gratifying."

Providing access to technology is a major focus for both adult and youth programming, and the bank of computers is almost always full during library hours. New tables in the Southwest Room afford visitors the opportunity to plug in and charge their devices, and staff lead periodic "open labs" to assist people with basic computer skills, which help enhance skills and employment prospects.

"I've experienced people who've been able to find a job

Library...

and get off public assistance because of the skills that they developed through their local library," Dayer said. "This added value of that personal interaction is something that we'll never be able to quantify but we know makes a big difference for the people that we serve."

Young children may also access computers in 45-minute blocks, and the children's room features early literacy computer programs for children ages 2-8. Homework and study help is also available online through the New Mexico State Library.

Technology sits at the heart of a trending philosophical debate among librarians as to how to balance educational programming with entertainment. Especially in rural areas, often families can't afford computers, pricey gaming devices and internet services, so the local library becomes a hub for family entertainment — a place where adults can bring their children and enjoy an opportunity to socialize with other adults while their children learn and have fun. All programming is free, and is made possible with town funding and volunteers of the Friends of the Library, who raise funds through book sales and other activities to supplement the town's library budget.

Library programs are increasingly popular among all ages, and more children and young adults are taking advantage of the library's varied offerings than ever before. Wednesdays, "Babytime" offers song, music and movement for babies up to 2 years old, led by Nancy Stephens of Imagination Library, a Grant County nonprofit dedicated to inspiring children to read, while "Storytime" offers similar programming for children less than 5 years old. Also on Wednesdays, "Future Engineers" gives children ages 6-12 an opportunity to test their skills with LEGO bricks as well as STEM (science, technology, engineering and math)-themed kits like magnet experiments and circuit kits, and the Little Artist Club provides artistic learning to children under 5.

Minecraft Club meets each Tuesday from 4-5 p.m., offering children ages 6 and older a chance to play this highly popular, multi-player adventure and building game. Some Saturday mornings, the library offers Library Arcade, during which children 10 and up may play video and board games, listen to music and have fun — all in a safe, supervised setting.

Every Thursday at 4 p.m., Wildworks gives youth a chance to build robots with LEGO Mindstorms, play with circuitry, learn crafts and more. The popular Nintendo Switch game is now available through the program, and green-screen technology is coming, which will enhance youth video productions. Such technology-infused creative play offers children of all socioeconomic backgrounds the opportunity to test their logic and troubleshooting skills, and learn the fundamentals of digital coding.

"Wildworks is a youth 'makerspace' — part of a national trend to provide more hands-on, collaborative learning opportunities," said Lillian Galloway, assistant library director. "We work very closely with local partners who are busy creating more such spaces, where creative types can use tools, three-D printers and other technology to create art, or maybe even launch a new business idea. The library is truly part of a larger effort to bring more learning opportunities to our community."

Adult programming reflects Grant County's cultural diversity, offering everything from tales of cross-country horse travel to poetry reading, genealogy research and free concerts, including such artists as Grant County's own Danny Cordova, as well as Chuy Martinez, presented by the New Mexico Humanities Council.

Celebrating Silver City's entrepreneurial spirit, the library is participating in a grant-funded initiative, Libraries as Launchpads, which connects aspiring entrepreneurs and existing start-ups to the resources they need to develop their ideas and passion into successful businesses. This five-week business accelerator program is in full swing, and workshops will be held later this year.

Such variety of programming and services is not common to small, rural libraries. Dayer and staff pride themselves on creatively meeting the ever-changing and diverse needs of the community.

"We are constantly working to improve our services and meet the needs of our patrons," said Dayer, who is currently focused on a variety of projects to

improve the visitor experience and save precious resources, including energy improvements such as solar panels and energy-saving LED lights.

New, more comfortable furniture will feature ports for charging tech devices and support the modern library user who may stay for several hours rather than just drop in to check out a book. Movable furniture will make it easier for groups to work together on collaborative projects.

The library's tremendous programming success has elevated the need for a dedicated room for young adults — soon to become reality — providing a safe space where older children can hang out, play computer games and have fun without disturbing others.

Innovation and public service reach beyond library walls. New Mexico Library To Go provides access to more than 9,000 e-books and audio books with a library account and the free Overdrive app. Millions of other free titles from around the world and in other languages may be accessed through dozens of online databases. Other specialty items include free Wi-Fi hotspots available for loan, and FamilyPasses, which provide groups of up to six people free access to some 15 museums and historical sites around the state.

Looking for a particular genre? Visit the library's website at silvercitypubliclibrary.org to access helpful resources such as finding the next good read, to perhaps access the Library of Congress or El Portal, a service of the New Mexico State Library. El Portal provides free access to resources that aren't normally free on the internet, such as Chilton auto manuals, resources for small businesses or BrainFuse HelpNow, a study aid for students.

Balancing the needs of old-school library users with modern technology, gaming and web-based resources isn't easy, Dayer said, particularly in a "pretech" space and with limited resources, yet there's something for everyone at the Silver City Public Library, where a real, live person even answers the phone.

Lisa Jimenez is contracted by the town of Silver City as a freelance writer, and this series of articles about municipal services is a joint project of the Daily Press and the town. The articles appear on Mondays.



The town of Silver City Public Library staff are working hard to create a welcoming space for the pursuit of personal passions. Pictured are Donna

Foley, library clerk; Ken Dayer, director; Virginia McIntyre, library clerk; Javier Marrufo, public services manager; Lillian Galloway, assistant director; Chris Baumgarn, children's and youth services librarian; Kerri Clark, technical services coordinator; Jacqueline Haden, library clerk; and D'Ana Torres, custodian.

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