

Libraries: a Strong and Lasting American Institution

By Drew Brookhart

The future of the public library in the United States is bright. Libraries are faced with incredible opportunities to help Americans connect with information that can positively impact their lives. There are a lot of different applications for the label library. My phone has a music library as does my computer at home. I own a library of electronic books and over the years I am sure I will own a lot more. There are seed libraries where we catalog and preserve the history of plants on earth. There are law libraries and corporate libraries and university libraries and the Library of Congress. The public library in the United States is set apart from all of these libraries. The public library is one of our most steadfast, enduring, and important public investments. The public library exists to ensure that our communities are home to educated, informed, curious, and connected people. That is a big task and libraries tackle it through developing collections, building systems to discover those collections, providing children with opportunities for enrichment, and giving parents the tools they need to teach pre-kindergarten children. The public library also ensures that we are providing equitable access to the internet for all our citizens. That access is a key element to being competitive and successful in today's United States. In Columbus, Nebraska we take the role of the public library further. In addition to education and information services we provide access to the visual and performing arts.

Columbus' 130 year investment in its public library has been an investment in itself. The effort our community has put into its public library has provided access to resources and services that are varied, meaningful, and a great value. In recent years the internet has been presented as a harbinger of death for the great American public library. The internet can be a wonderful and horrible place but the internet is no replacement for a library. Google has indexed roughly 35 trillion webpages, a meager 4% of what is online. Even within that 4% there is endless minutia, raw data, ego driven noise, and false information. There is also important content that is not indexed; the National Library of Medicine is a great example. Having a public library that can connect the public with valuable, venerable information is very important. As Columbus moves forward with the Library/Cultural Arts Center project we need to fully recognize the incredible value we all gain from our public libraries. By moving this strong, altruistic American institution forward we are moving our community forward. We are investing in children, in truth, and in our future. Over the last year the Library/Cultural Arts Center has attracted incredible support from both voters and from private donors. The Columbus community has until the last day of 2017 to complete the Quality of Life matching grant. Please consider becoming a part of this historic project with a gift to the Columbus Library Foundation. The Library/Cultural Arts Center project is absolutely necessary and critical to continuing the great good that is spread by and through our public library.