

Library Important for Columbus by Drew Brookhart

The current Columbus Public Library is a very well used community asset. On Thursday, February 23, 2017 the Columbus Telegram's Tyler Ellyson wrote an article titled, "People use library, say numbers." Ellyson highlighted several statistics from Columbus Public Library's annual report that indicate the continuing and increasing popularity of library services. What the numbers do not show is the depth of impact the library makes in people's lives. There are people who really need the library. For certain people in our community the library provides their only access to information, in all of its many forms. There are even more people who simply enjoy the library's collections, services, and programs. All library users benefit from the significant money saved by being a patron of the library. Columbus parents enjoy a virtually unlimited supply of new books with their free library card. The expense of providing that level of access to educational materials for children would be insurmountable for nearly all Columbus families. Many retired Columbus residents are also avid readers who take full advantage of the library's collections and services. In addition to collections, the library provides free access to educational and entertaining programs. This past year the library hosted 461 programs and they were attended by over 21,000 people. The number is impressively high, what we cannot see in that number are all of the positive outcomes from those 21,000 experiences. Children enjoyed new lessons, ideas, and language through stories. People learned about other cultures and places. Connections were made through book club discussions. These positive experiences, facilitated by the library, extend out into the community and make Columbus a better place to live and work.

One of the unique things about Columbus Public Library is its inclusion of access to the visual arts, performing arts, and extensive programming in its goals. The art gallery in the basement of the library drew in 8,000 visitors last year. By providing traditionally "non-library" services, both as Columbus Public Library and with the help of the not-for-profit Columbus Arts Council, the library building becomes a multi-purpose facility. *Library Journal's* Marta Murvosh (2012) writes that mixed-use library developments "can transform a neighborhood . . . Libraries built with partners in Boston, Milwaukee, and Rifle, CO, have been credited with helping spur economic development and bringing a sense of community to their neighborhoods." Columbus Public Library is ahead of its time, nearly 30 years ago the library created a gallery on the lower level of Columbus Public Library. The creation of the gallery prompted the partnership with Columbus Arts Council. That partnership is making it possible to provide the public with access to the arts. The art gallery, located in the basement of the library, fosters creativity, critical thinking and cultural awareness and positive economic impact. Last year the Columbus Public Library helped bring 137,683 visitors to the historic downtown shopping district.

While Platte County, including Columbus, gained 181 new residents last year the library gained 1,180 new users. If you have not been to the library in a while come see what you have been missing. The library is free to try and always will be.

Additional information about current Columbus Public Library use and services is available on the City of Columbus website www.columbusne.us.