Librarian's Shelf

By Drew Brookhart

Building Libraries of the Future Now

It is exciting to feel energy build around a library and cultural arts center in downtown Columbus. The Columbus City Council has had their support galvanized by grant money coming into the project from outside Columbus and the Library Foundation has been diligently preparing for the work ahead. This is a good moment in time to reacquaint ourselves with information, libraries, and how they work for and with people. Information is flexible, compressible, and moveable. Even vast quantities of information can be contained in a tiny space. Knowledge derived from that information can be presented in any multitude of formats, it wants to be shared, and it is everywhere. The internet is a great example of a flood of information. Wisdom is harder to find, harder to share, and harder to store. The physical space of the library is the living room of wisdom. People need space to thrive; we cannot even fit on the largest of hard drives. We need to interact with one another and share the experience of living and learning. As our community embarks on the creation of a new library space we will inevitably ask ourselves the question: are libraries even relevant anymore? These conversations are always fun to have. If we imagine our library in 200 years we can easily see that our collection will be enormous. We have been in the same location for nearly 40 years, use of the library has more than tripled during time. Use of the library's collections and services increase every year and the library continues to expand those services. Just in the last few years we have been nearly doubling our electronic circulations each year while use of the print collection continues to grow at a steady rate. It is safe to assume that if we are not constrained by physical space, a reality that new technologies are making possible, our growth and contribution to the community will continue to expand. What if we could make our library collection infinite? This is an idea to celebrate. Many cloud based storage providers are currently offering storage rates that are very reasonable. If we imagine the collection of the Columbus Public Library as a digital body it would be relatively small our digitized library would be roughly 325GB. To give you an idea of how much space that is; the entire works of Shakespeare would consume about 2MB of space. What does that mean? As libraries are able to gain access to digital items an infinitely large library is not out of the question! A big, meaningful step toward making this type of knowledge structure tenable emerged from the Author's Guild VS HathiTrust case. On October 10, 2012, Judge Harold Baer of the U.S. District Court in New York ruled in favor of the HathiTrust Digital Library and its university partners in a copyright infringement suit brought by the Authors Guild and other groups. In his ruling the judge dismissed the AG's arguments that the HathiTrust had violated copyright law by making scanned works available for certain uses. The 2012 decision was upheld and at the beginning of January the Author's Guild peeled back from further legal action. So, when you think of a library in 100, 300, or 500 years imagine a beautiful building with spaces for discussion, contemplation and creation where wisdom can be shared. Imagine skilled librarians making sure that everyone has access to organized, meaningful resources that raise the level of public discussion above the din of the internet. Imagine all that topped off with a collection of the best hardbacks available.