

Libraries Evolve with Changing Demographics

Tailoring programs for immigrants; and modernizing with technology

BY CARI HACHMANN
THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

Dovetailing our city's increased library use with changing demographics, Portland libraries tailor new, educational programs for immigrants and modernize technology to meet more needs, faster.

Multnomah County Library, the oldest public library west of the Mississippi, received a 2011 National Association of Counties Achievement Award for its work with immigrant communities within the city limits.

The library's Resources for Immigrant's program, an extension of one of the library's key priorities of providing immigrants with information and resources needed to participate successfully in life in the United States, has dramatically improved free and educational services.

"We view this recognition of the library's ability to effectively respond to the changing needs of the community, something made possible by countless hours of hard work by incredibly dedicated staff," said Vailey Oehlke, director of the local library system.

Doubling staff from 30 in 2005, 77 librarians including four bilingual youth librarians now serve 11 branch libraries. Rich collections, citizenship programs, language learning labs, and conversation circles for non-natives are among resources Multnomah County Library has tailored for an evolving community.

"While this is a milestone for the library, it is clear there is more work to be done here, and we look forward to meeting these challenges, now and in the future," said Oehlke.

Last year, 27,246 county residents attended 1,843 programs and while providing 27 percent more library materials in Spanish, Chinese, Russian, and Vietnamese, usage of such resources increased 81 percent.

Library staff now presents story times in Spanish, Cantonese, Mandarin, Russian, and Vietnamese at nine library locations and offer computer assistance in Spanish, Chinese, Russian, and Vietnamese.

While a swell in immigrant resources reflects a changing tide in Portland's demographics, overall Multnomah County's library circulation has increased steadily over the last decade, with checkouts and renewals doubling, and holds tripling.

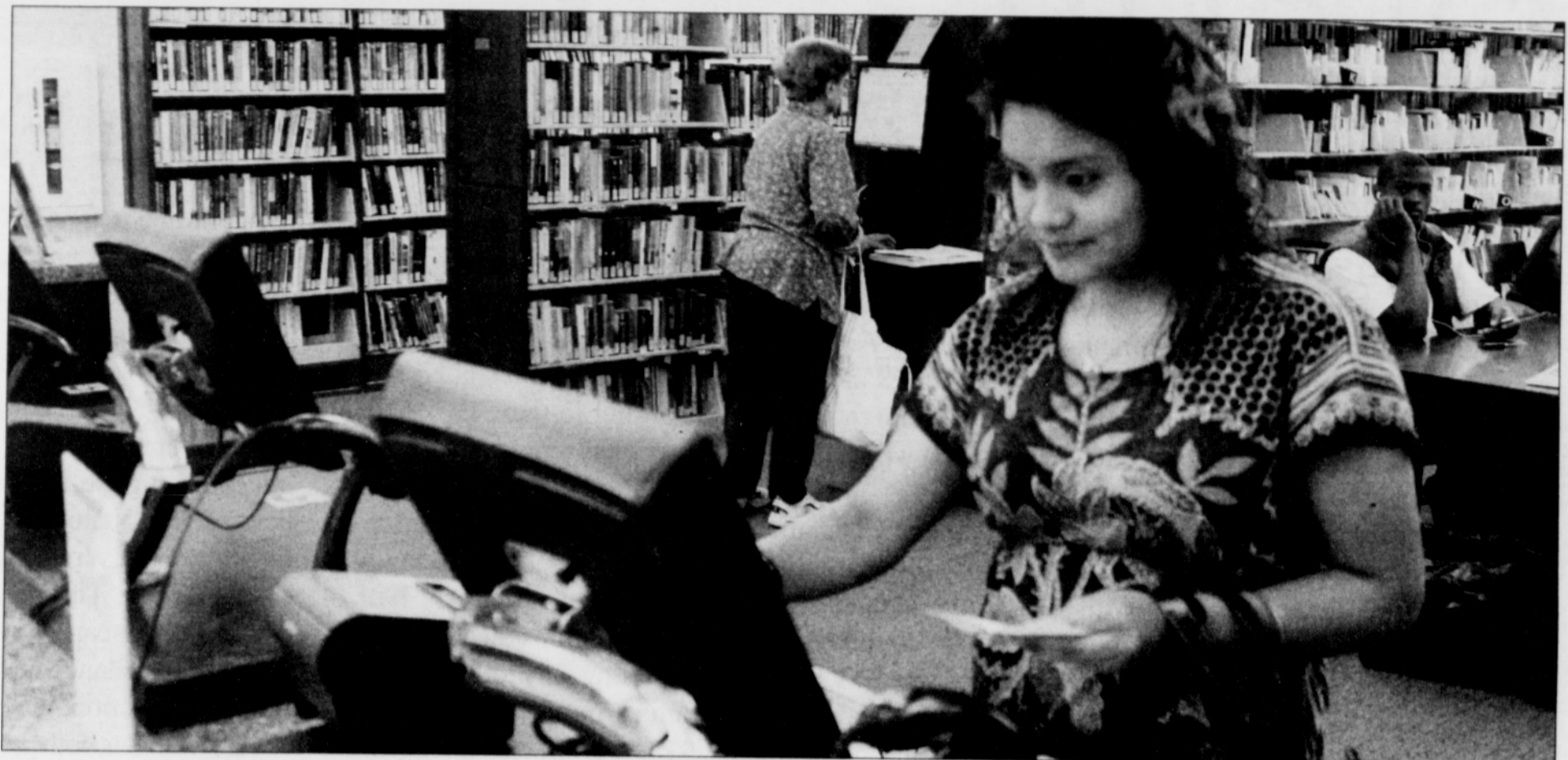


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Rebecca Felix, a regular North Portland library patron, says the newly installed checkout station makes it easier to check out books herself, whereas before she might have to wait in a long line.



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Along with 18 neighborhood libraries in Multnomah County, North Portland Library updated services with a whole new look; including three new checkout stations, security gates, and enhanced stations for internet and circulation.

In 2009, a citizen-led advisory committee recommended the replacement of outdated check-out systems with the installation of a new data-tagging system called Radio Frequency Identification or RFID.

This summer, 19 neighborhood libraries

received the installation of new checkout stations, security gates, and the tagging of nearly two million library books, CDs, DVDs, and other items with RFID tags.

Items tagged with RFID barcodes are more easily read than the library's old

scanners, making check-in and check-outs faster, and giving staff a better inventory device for held or missing items along with overall, more efficient stewardship of collections. The tags also prevent theft of library materials.

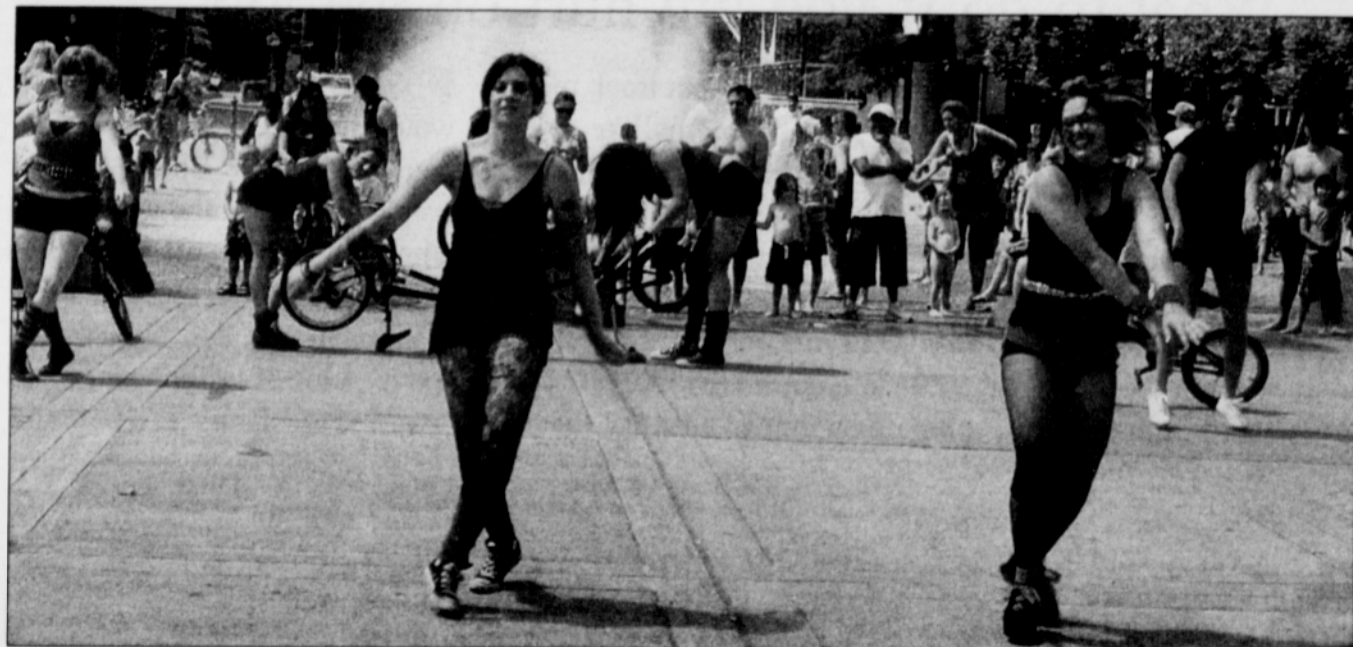
"We all have busy lives, so coming to the library to check out and place holds —it [RFID] dramatically cuts down on the time to get what you need and be on your way," said Jeremy Graybill, Multnomah County Library's marketing and communications director.

Now that RFID-enabled checkout stations offer patrons the speed, convenience, and privacy of checking out their own books, staff can get out from behind the desk and help more people with other needs.

"We love it, and the public seems to love it," said Patricia Walsh, manager at North Portland Library, who says the new features to the branch are more in line with their service principles.

With about 31,000 items checked out a day from the library, about 80% of all checkouts are now handled by the patron, up from 19 percent in 2009, while the numbers of missing items at Central Library has reduced by 61 percent.

The enormous project, which cost just over \$2.9 million with \$2.1 paid for by the library and \$800,000 coming from the Multnomah County, was completed by more than 60 volunteers who donated over 1,100 hours of work.



Summer Parkways Reaches Downtown

Fountains at Waterfront Park burst behind the Sprockettes, young dancers from a summer girls' camp, as the group kicks off the fun for audiences attending Sunday Parkways, a city sponsored event of traffic-free streets. From Wallace Park in northwest Portland all the way to the Waterfront, the free Sunday event offered live music, food, bike rides, dancing, disc golf, fitness lessons, and more summer musings.

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