



PHOTO BY DONOVAN M. SMITH/THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

A children's library with an assortment of books and other materials is part of the collection at Concordia University's new George R. White Library and Learning Center, a resource available for free to the public. Welcoming neighborhood residents to the northeast Portland facility are Concordia University executives Gary Withers (left) and Madeline Turnock, along with Concordia Librarian Brent Mai.

Open University

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wanted to come to, so that whether you were a student paying tuition or you were a neighbor who lived across the street, you felt like it was your library." says Gary Withers, Concordia's executive vice president for external affairs.

Before a 2009 renovation, the library was tucked deep into the second floor of another building on campus. However after investing nearly \$14 million into the new space, the library was placed in a much more accessible part of the campus.

Since opening its doors to non-students, the school has issued thousands of free library cards; almost 2,300 were distributed last year alone with community card holders checking out 6,928 items.

Besides the occasional overdue book, and the slightly more frequent unattended minors, Concordia Librarian Brent Mai says the biggest downside to the increased access is that "Everybody wants to use it at the same time." He deduces the demand

for use as being "typical" for any public library.

There is always a steady stream of young kids weaving their way between the library shelves. The library and campus is just one block away from Faubion Elementary School, Concordia's educational partner with Portland Public Schools.

Every semester the university sends 150 students over to help Faubion students with homework, tutoring, and build literacy skills.

"We really like to think of ourselves as a resource for the community in the very broadest sense," Withers says.

With local issues ranging from conflicts over race, education, gentrification, faith, and more, the 108-year-old university is striving to be a positive agent with its open doors and community projects.

"We understand the challenges for people over the decades, and we want to open our arms and welcome folks in," says Withers. "It's the right thing to do, and hopefully we do it in a way that's modest."

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