

Then & Now: Libraries find ways to stay relevant

By JENNIFER COSTLEY

When I was in library school everyone was talking about the library of the future. What would it look like? Would it all live on-line? Would we be virtual librarians Facetiming patrons from our apartments in the sky? Or worse, would it not exist at all? My guess is they still ask every new librarian that question. After all, if you don't have some concept of the future of libraries, what will motivate you to finish school and what contribution will you make when you finally land that first job?

To many of my co-workers, Pendleton Public Library has transformed over the last 20 years. It might not be what they imagined as the library of the future, but it is far different than the library they once knew. Twenty years ago,

Pendleton Public Library had just moved from the old Carnegie Library building (now the Pendleton Center for the Arts) to the former Helen McCune Junior High School, home to both city hall and the library. Patrons came to check out vinyl records, VHS tapes, books, audiobooks (some still on cassettes), and magazines.

Each summer they had a summer reading program and each week there was a story time. There were no programs for adults and public-use computers were a new and exciting development, thanks to the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. Service was focused on reference and readers advisory.



People came for the books and movies, and the people that led them to those things. You might be surprised to hear that our circulation was actually five percent higher than it is today and the library owned more items as well.

That was 1998 and then, like now, people said the internet would do away with the library. If it took 20 years to knock five percent off our circulation statistics, should we really be worried that libraries are being wiped out by the internet and other digital options? I would argue that the opposite is happening. The library is evolving to ensure that our patrons have full access to those things. We understand that you want more than books and magazines and we are trying to meet you where you are.

For example, we now offer programs outside of the library, programs like our summer story time in the park, and author readings and trivia night at Prodigal Son. And though our children's program attendance has grown by 97 percent over the last 20 years

(making that five percent decrease in circulation seem pretty insignificant), one of the biggest changes we have made is in recognizing the need for adult programming.

Did you know that the library offers monthly parent education classes? Also beginning computer courses, technology classes such as how to use Google Drive, building a resume, and getting started with digital check-outs? Or that we have bi-monthly author readings

and monthly Do it Yourself craft programs, designed specifically for adults?

We hope you know about these things because getting the word out on our services has been one of our major goals over the last few years. With the advent of social media, our potential to reach you has increased infinitely, but we still struggle to make people see us as more than books, magazines, and story times. I'm not worried that libraries won't be here in 20 years. I'm worried that the Library of the Future will be awesome, but a good portion of the population will remain in the dark about all they truly offer.

If it has been a while since you visited the library now is a good time to drop in and ask what has changed. We're dying to tell you!

Jennifer Costley is Assistant Director and Youth Services Librarian at the Pendleton Public Library, as well as author of the new young adult novel "The Exchange."



CUW Head Start

OPEN ENROLLMENT

Looking for Children ages 3-5

CUW Offers:

- Comprehensive preschool program with school readiness
- Curriculum that encourages children to develop good personal & health habits
- Cultural activities that promote self-esteem & social development

For more information:

Please call CUW Head Start Office: 541-429-7834