



Not Just

By the Book

Today's libraries have turned a page by offering more to library card holders than just books.

By Kevin Fritz

While owning a library card is still popular and free — the American Library Association (ALA) reports that 58 percent of Americans over the age of 16 have one — what you can get with that card has changed dramatically over the past decade. Streaming movies and television programs, computer and business classes, clubs, seminars, family activities, and access to the latest technology is commonplace at libraries across the nation. Moreover, the bulk of public libraries now offer software access, live assistance and other resources to help with creating résumés and to find informational employment materials.

And although the ALA admits more than half of library patrons today use the facilities solely to access the Internet or e-books, the majority of users — 73 percent — still check out printed books the old-fashioned way. It seems the more things change, the

more they stay the same.

The Orlando area is fortunate to be flush with libraries from Sanford to Windermere. The Orange County Library system boasts 15 libraries, while Seminole County is home to five. Nationwide, there are more than 16,000 public libraries.

The Granddaddy: Downtown Orlando

In downtown Orlando, the headquarters of the Orange County Library System is also home to the Orlando Public Library, the centerpiece of area libraries. The 290,000-square-foot facility is the largest public library building in the state of Florida, and it has been located at its site since it opened as the Albertson Public Library in 1923.

Here you can rent a room, play games — electronic and otherwise — rent DVDs and CDs, and for old-schoolers, microfilm is still available.

“Libraries have evolved to be way more than books,” says **Tracy Zampaglione**,

APR, public relations administrator for the Orange County Library System. “We have computer classes. We offer more than 1,000 classes a month system-wide. And of course we have new release DVDs, the same day as Netflix, but only ours are free!”

One of the more exciting additions to the library system is ‘hoopla,’ an online service that allows library card holders to stream movies, television shows, audiobooks and music from anywhere on a personal computer, smartphone or tablet. No cost, no lines, no waiting, no fines.

Zampaglione says the library is also proud of its new online magazine service, Zinio, in which library card holders can view and download about 250 magazines on computers, tablets and smartphones at no charge.

The main branch is also patiently awaiting its new tech center, currently under construction, that will house labs for visual arts, film, digital media, graphic design and audio engineering.

East Side Happenings

On the east side of town, the Alafaya Branch, which originally opened in 1965 as the Azalea Park branch and moved into its present location in 2000, continues to attract a great deal of families, so many of its programs are geared toward education and creating fun experiences.

Branch Manager **Danielle King**, who has been with the library for 12 years, says being near the University of Central Florida (UCF) helps them tap into the school's expertise and integrate new programs, such as its Bubbles Playtime Class held in conjunction with UCF's Sports and Exercise program.

“It's highly popular,” she says. “Who knew — bubbles?” King says it helps with the motor development of children as they grasp and jump for the round, floating soap suds.

Computer classes are very popular, she adds, from basic to advanced, including some in Spanish. There is even a video game class where patrons create their own games. King also works with Workforce Central Florida to provide résumé writing classes.

The branch features an Early Literacy Station, which is a self-contained bilingual educational computer for children, with more than 56 top-rated educational software programs spanning seven curricular areas.

South By Southwest

The Southwest Branch of the Orange County Library System, which opened in 1989, is a popular place for families and senior citizens in the Dr. Phillips and MetroWest communities. Branch Manager **Bethany Stone** says its

music and art programs for seniors are doing extremely well, both presentation-wise and hands-on classes. An annual author event co-sponsored by the Rotary Club of Dr. Phillips attracts a diverse crowd as well.

“Our branch also has the longest running book club in the [Orange County Library] system,” she adds. “It has been running monthly for eight years.”

Nonetheless, Stone says technology is a crowd pleaser. “E-Books and e-readers are extremely popular here,” she says. “We teach a lot of people how to access e-books and use e-readers they have received as gifts.” She adds that the Zinio magazine program is catching on very fast as word gets around that hundreds of titles patrons may otherwise buy are available for free from the library. This branch is closed on Sundays.

Northwest and Beyond

At the Northwest Branch Library in Lake Mary, which follows the direction of the Seminole County Public Library system, adult programs have become quite

the rage, namely the book clubs, knitting classes, and business seminars — especially those geared toward small businesses — according to **Denise Tate**, library resource manager.

And, as the case with most libraries today, Internet access is a major draw, especially for job seekers and those required to fill out online forms for public assistance.

Virtual library use is significant in Seminole County, in particular the use of the AskALibrarian feature, which is accessible by email, text or online. E-books, videos and audio books can be downloaded as well, and the library's online databases have thousands of articles, reference books, practice tests, health and medical information, and more for the taking. Virtual use has become even more prevalent now that, due to budget restraints, the branch is closed on Fridays. **L**

For more information on Central Florida's public libraries, visit our website at CentralFloridaLifestyle.com.



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