

The Next Chapter

Newsletter of the Cedar Rapids Public Library Foundation

The public library in the electronic age

What lies ahead for the public library? Is there even a need for public libraries in the Internet age? You might have heard – or asked – this question in recent months or years.

Public libraries – including our own – are changing. But in essential ways libraries continue to fulfill the vision of philanthropist Andrew Carnegie and the local women, such as Cedar Rapidian Ada Van Vechten, who promoted their existence in hundreds of communities across the United States a century ago.

Take a stroll around the Cedar Rapids Public Library, perhaps even ask a few patrons what they're doing, and you'll get a sense of all the ways people are continuing to use the library's varied resources – from reading and researching to accessing job applications and borrowing music or movies. Attending a public lecture or discussion at the library will offer yet another perspective.

What will likely become clear is that, while many people purchase books or use home computers to access information, libraries are hardly falling into disuse. They continue to be places of enlightenment, entertainment, life-long learning, and community involvement. They are, indeed, the most public of all our public spaces, drawing people of all ages and all economic strata at all times of the day and week.

A recent study by the non-profit public policy research group Public Agenda investigated what civic leaders and the public think about the role of the public library in the Internet age. The group's findings confirmed that most citizens believe that all children should have good libraries in their neighborhoods, that libraries play a crucial role in preserving permanent records, and that government should support the wiring of libraries so that all people in the community have access to the Internet.

For many people and communities, libraries serve as the “go-to” place to explore areas of public interest such as health information, job services, immigrant acculturation, and literacy training. At the same time, these vital places often suffer from challenges that include confusing governance structures, lack of marketing, lukewarm advocacy, and isolation from the community.


Our library has an unparalleled opportunity to become a welcoming



Children's books and computer access are priorities for public libraries.

CRPL Photo

place that links people, technology and knowledge; promotes community engagement; reflects local culture and aspirations, and creates partnerships with other community groups to deliver public programs, events and initiatives.

Through its collections, services and programming, the Cedar Rapids Public Library is already realizing aspects of that vision. All that is needed to ensure its future is the passionate engagement of citizens who demand that our elected officials understand and support the evolving, yet indispensable, role of the public library. 

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OUR MISSION

The Cedar Rapids Public Library Foundation secures resources in order to enhance and enrich library programs, services, and facilities not normally met by public funding.

VP treasures small gifts, thick books

Books and libraries have been at the center of Dr. Tom Hansen's life since he was a child growing up in Waterloo, Iowa.

A longtime psychiatrist at the Cedar Centre Psychiatric Group, the Library Foundation Vice President got his library card soon after he and wife Mary moved to Cedar Rapids in 1980. The couple, who have three grown children, have been members of the same book club since the early 1980s, and Hansen happily spends spare hours at the Cedar Rapids Public Library.

"I'm always down there roaming around trying to find books," he says, noting a preference for fiction.


Fellow book club members recommended Hansen for a position on the Foundation Board, which he joined in 2007. He sees the Foundation's role as one of managing donated funds prudently and making key donations to library projects.

"We're doing the downloadable online books right now," he says,

stressing that, while the library's operation should remain publicly funded, "the Foundation helps to do more than the bare bones. We need to enhance what the public can do."

Recently, Hansen encouraged the library to create an option for donors to give online and through automatic withdrawal from personal accounts. "It's a way to tap into little people as well as big donors," he explains, counting himself among the former. "Many people would like to know how to help the library in hard times. By giving incrementally – especially if you can get matching funds – you can make a significant contribution, even with \$10 a month. And with automatic withdrawal, the library doesn't have to come back to you each year and ask for your contribution."

Hansen says he has no fears about the future of his beloved institution. "If you look around the country, new libraries are being built all the time, and libraries are becoming civic centers." The Cedar Rapids Library is already fulfilling

that role, he says, citing the frequent use of Beems Auditorium and the library's computers. For his part, Hansen still appreciates being able to stop in, browse the shelves, and pick up a book or two. "If the only books you can read are the ones you can buy, that really limits your reading." 



Foundation Vice President Tom Hansen finds contentment wandering among the library's bookshelves – and discussing literature with his book group pals. (Top) Gary Boe (l-r) Marjory Boe, Mary Russell Curran, Cathy Gullickson, Marc Gullickson, Tom Hansen, (bottom) Mary (aka Monique) Hansen.

Engle memoir stirs local readers

This year's Linn Area Reads book selection, Paul Engle's memoir *A Lucky American Childhood*, ignited unprecedented community interest as it delighted readers with descriptions of Cedar Rapids in the early 20th century and generated lively discussions about local history and memoir writing.

Engle (1908-1991), a renowned poet and educator who grew up in Cedar Rapids, was the longtime director of the Iowa Writers Workshop and co-founder with his wife, Hualing Nieh Engle, of the International Writing Program at the University of Iowa.

Hundreds of area individuals and book group members read the memoir, says Adult Services Manager Karen Johnson. "We had more than 100 copies, and often nearly all of them were checked out. We heard so many wonderful comments about the book. It's so evocative of the sights and smells of this area. The fact that Paul Engle grew up as a hard-working boy from this area made it more immediate. There were so many connections for different people."


Readers were encouraged to make those connections and think about their own history through a range of seminars and discussions, beginning with a memoir writing workshop held at the Paul Engle Neighborhood Center.

Panel discussions about the book were held at all three metro area libraries, and CRPL librarian Gerry Hopkins led a book discussion at Barnes & Noble. That event was noteworthy, Hopkins says, because Polk Elementary School students who had recently completed a unit

on Engle presented drawings and poems they had created based on his life and work. "The older people got to hear them and then talk about how Cedar Rapids used to be and how it had changed."

At a forum sponsored by *The Cedar Rapids Gazette*, local historian Mark Hunter, Coe College Writer in Residence Ann Struthers, and longtime Cedar Rapids civic leader Bill Shuttleworth talked about "What We Can Learn from Life Stories."

The library's final event in March showcased an exhibit by students from Johnson School for the Arts. Speakers included Hualing Engle, Cedar Rapids native Joan Greenblatt, and Lisa Schlesinger, who is writing a play about Engle.


Greenblatt, whose grandfather provided encouragement and support to the aspiring young writer, said, "I remember Paul and my grandfather sitting on our big screened-in porch discussing poetry," she says, adding that Engle's memoir appealed to people of all ages and even to those who did not grow up in Cedar Rapids. "Paul was a poet, primarily, and his book reads like poetry." 



Download audio books

Thanks to funding from the CRPL Foundation, the library is now offering audio books that can be downloaded to your computer or listening device or, in some cases, burned to a CD.

The new service is a joint project with the Hiawatha and Marion Public Libraries and is available through the Metro Library Network website (which can be accessed through the CRPL website).

Nearly 500 books are available for downloading, with more to be added in the future. Like print books, the audio books are made available for a limited period of time. 



A January workshop on memoir writing, held at the Paul Engle Neighborhood Center, 1600 4th Ave. SE, launched a series of events related to the Linn Community Reads book, A Lucky American Life.

Between the Lines

Director search underway

Following the resignation of Lori Barkema in April, the CRPL Board of Trustees began the search for a new library director. “We hope to make a selection by this fall,” said board vice president Susan Corrigan. “During the search, we will continue to move forward with library building and operating plans and campaigns.” During the interim, assistant library director Tamara Glise will serve as director. 

Read and WIN!

Summer reading programs for children, youth and adults are underway. Participate and you’ll be eligible to win fabulous prizes donated by area businesses—including bicycles for children, spending money for youths, and

gardening supplies for adults.

Preschool-age through fifth grade can register for “Catch the Reading Bug” at the downtown facility, West Side branch in Westdale Mall or the Hiawatha Public Library. Summer programming—free and open to the public—includes movies, crafts, a bug creation project, Toddler Time, Old MacDonald Farm story times with related crafts at Bever Park, Summer Discovery programs by Linn Co. Extension Service, and Celebrate Summer! programs with the Bluedorn Imaginarium from the Grout Museum District.


For more information call Library Programming Services (319) 398-5123, ex. 258 or check www.crlibrary.org. 



Photo by John Earl

CR author book reading

Cedar Rapids native John Sandford, a Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist and bestselling novelist, will read from his latest thriller, *Phantom Prey*, at 7 p.m. June 19 at Theatre Cedar Rapids. Sandford is the third and final author in the 2008 Out Loud! Metro Library Network Author Series funded by a three-year grant from the John P. and Lawrence J. Giacoletto Foundation. The event is free; no tickets are required. 