

The Joint-Use Library in Carrboro: Bringing Together Orange County Public Library and Chapel-Hill/Carrboro City Schools

Joint-use libraries have been created to share resources, reduce facilities costs, and more efficiently serve patrons.¹ There have been several notable examples in the news. In the summer of 2013, a joint-use facility opened in Virginia Beach, a partnership between the Virginia Beach Public Library and the Tidewater Community College, whose campus houses the facility.² A decade before that, the Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Library opened in San Jose, merging the San José Main Public Library with the San Jose State University Library.³ But did you know that North Carolina has had a joint-use library in Carrboro for some 20 years?

McDougle Middle School Media Center

Opening in 1995, the facility joins together McDougle Middle School Library Media Center and the Carrboro Branch of the Orange County Public Library. This partnership creates a large collection of materials and a busy space all day. The library opens at 8 AM for McDougle students, who are welcomed to study, do homework, and check out books. With passes from their teachers, they may come during the school day, and both individuals and groups use the media center after school. The media center is staffed by Library Teacher Carolyn White and Library Assistant Barbara Brownwell.⁴

Ms. White began working at McDougle in 1996, and has not worked in any other joint-use library. She communicates often with her public library counterparts, talking with them when they come in for work, and emailing on occasion. There's also a notebook that both media center and public library staff use for writing down problems, questions, or concerns. They used to meet formally, but haven't done so recently. They address topics like overdue books, policies and procedures, and student use during public library time.⁵

When asked what benefits she sees to the joint-use arrangement, White answered that the sharing of resources

is a benefit. Sharing creates more use than the materials might otherwise have had, including use during the summer. She is also appreciative of the access to an adult collection and wider overall choice of books, as well as the fact that the library is open after school for students. What drawbacks would planners have to overcome? Ms. White noted that higher use means more wear on the materials. When asked how the fact that this is a joint-use library influences her work as a school librarian, her answer focused on the importance of planning ahead.⁶

There are some significant similarities and differences in the library experience for school users and public



library patrons. Both libraries use a shared catalog (Follett) with all holdings displayed—this is actually a similarity that creates a difference between the Carrboro Branch Library and the Orange County Public Library’s main branch in Hillsborough. The Library’s website notes that public library cards issued at other sites “can be activated for use at the Carrboro Branch Library”⁷ Another difference is that there are not overlapping hours between the space’s use as the McDougle Middle School Media Center and the Carrboro Branch Library.

Carrboro Branch Library

The Carrboro Branch Library is open after school Mondays through Thursdays until 8:00 PM, and also open midday Saturdays and on Sunday afternoons. Students and patrons must have a valid public library card to use the computers during public library hours. Programs for the branch include a book club for adults which meets one Tuesday night per month, and Saturday morning storytimes which are aimed at a preschool audience.

Erin Sapienza serves as head of both



the Carrboro Branch Library and the Carrboro Cybrary; she has worked at both about two years. In a telephone conversation, she said that she finds the experience of working in a joint-use library educational and interesting. Sapienza reports that since their offices are close by, she can “pop in on occasion” to speak with her school library counterparts. School closings during

winter weather, afterschool activities, weeding and shifting, facilities and technology issues, book fairs and other events are all topics of conversation.

The two libraries have separate budgets, and materials are processed by the purchasing unit. However, all age-appropriate materials are shared, with some exceptions such as teaching materials. Sometimes the librarians will discuss high priority purchases, extra copies, or replacements.

One of the most important issues to navigate is the physical facility. There is no direct entrance from the outside; public library patrons must come through the school building just like the student users. The library is one large room, so this branch cannot offer meeting rooms or separate program spaces like other branches can.

Like White, Sapienza pointed out the availability of materials as a significant benefit. The shared facility contains a larger children’s collection than what might be found at other branch libraries, and the main branch can provide delivery of additional materials as needed. Collaboration with schools is important to public libraries,



and it is easier since they are colocated. When asked how the fact that this is a joint-use library influenced her work as a public librarian, Sapienza answered that she feels a greater appreciation for what we are capable of in getting services out to patrons.

One of the unique features of the Carrboro Branch is its art gallery. Sponsored by the Friends of the Carrboro Branch Library and the Orange County Arts Commission, the Art Gallery has displayed the works of more than 1,750 local artists over the last 18 years. There have been 4 gallery shows a year, and the one for the first quarter of 2015

was titled “Then and Now.” Participating artists for “Then and Now” included Nancy Whittington, Barbara Keighton, Linda Carmel, Nerys Levy, David Otto, David Taylor, Debbie Suchoff, Louise Francke, Artie Dixon, Alex O’Connor, Alice Levinson, and Gordon Jameson.⁸

A New Southern Branch?

Orange County has embarked on a plan to create a new Southern Branch in downtown Carrboro sometime in 2017. According to County webpages, “this new library would replace the Carrboro Branch Library, in

McDougle Middle School, and the Cybrary, in the Carrboro Century Center.” Among the latest actions noted was the approval by Board of County Commissioners of a Letter of Intent designed to “frame negotiations” that could eventually lead to the “development and construction of a Southern Branch Library.”⁹

Does this spell the end of the joint-use library in Carrboro? Perhaps, but the need to achieve efficiencies in space and staffing while maximizing the audience and materials means that overall, joint-use libraries will not go away any time soon.

References

¹ For more information, see “Joint-Use Libraries: A Bibliography,” ALA Library Fact Sheet Number 20. Chicago, IL: American Library Association, 2012. Retrieved March 15, 2015, from <http://www.ala.org/tools/libfactsheets/alalibrary-factsheet20>.

² “Tidewater Community College, City of Virginia Beach to Open Joint-Use Library,” News Releases @ TCC, August 5, 2013. Retrieved March 12, 2015 from <http://www.tcc.edu/news/press/2013/JULopening.htm>.

³ Peterson, Christina A. “Space Designed for Lifelong Learning: The Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Joint-Use Library.” In *Library as Place: Rethinking Roles, Rethinking Space*. CLIR Pub29. Washington, DC: Council on Library and Information Resources, 2005. Retrieved March 13, 2015 from <http://www.clir.org/pubs/reports/pub129/peterson.html>.

⁴ “McDougle Middle School Media Center: About” Retrieved March 14, 2015 from <https://sites.google.com/a/chccs.k12.nc.us/mcdougle-middle-school-library/about>.

⁵ Carolyn White, e-mail message to author, March 8, 2015.

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ “Orange County Public Library Cards,” Orange County, North Carolina. Retrieved March 3, 2015 from <http://orangecountync.gov/library/libcard.asp#carrboro>.

⁸ “Carrboro Branch Art Gallery.” Orange County, North Carolina. Retrieved March 3, 2015 from <http://orangecountync.gov/library/cbart.asp>.

⁹ “Imagine Your Southern Branch Library,” Orange County, North Carolina. Retrieved March 5, 2015 from <http://orangecountync.gov/library/southernbranch.asp>.

