

COVID-19 Hope

By the time you read this, the first half of the year of COVID-19 will have passed and we will have moved hopefully into a more open society. Slowly North Carolinians are beginning to come out of their holes and moving around public areas such as parks and streets. Libraries were especially missed by their users and were welcomed as they gradually re-opened. One of the interesting things I learned during the crisis was that hope is not a plan. We need to have more than just a hope that things will return to the old normal, we must plan for it.

When General Eisenhower landed on the beaches of Normandy in World War II, he did so after years of careful planning. He did not land on hope alone; the Allies had already tried that and failed. One of the more amazing plans he had involved laying an underwater pipeline from England to the coast of Normandy. And it worked, supplying the needed fuel for equipment to move inland. Just think of what might have happen if the Allies had run out of gas? Like Eisenhower we must learn from our past mistakes and plan for future events similar to COVID-19. With frequent hurricanes (as I write this we have had already two tropical storms hit North Carolina in May of 2020) North Carolinians are used to dealing with natural disasters.

Public Libraries in North Carolina are responding to the need by providing virtual services such as web based story times, opening their parking

lots to community based Wi-Fi, and slowly allowing patrons limited access to retrieve materials from collections. Some libraries have turned their 3D printing stations into PPE manufacturing stations, providing face shields for those who deal with COVID-19 patients. Recent studies seem to indicate that the time the COVID virus remains on books much less longer than originally thought, thereby allowing circulations to resume sooner. Electronic magazines and books of course were highly requested with some libraries able to purchase additional collections and many vendors opening their door to free access. Unfortunately most of these collections remain hidden to patrons since few libraries are the habit of cataloging materials they don't own. Some magazines, like *Our State* took the opportunity to cut off access to library patrons in certain subscription packages. This seems to happen with magazines in public library electronic collections. While I wish *Our State* well, this timing of this service cut off could not have been worse for North Carolina readers. With tax revenues uncertain, this may be the COVID future unfortunately, as magazine packages are cut back to save expenses.

So what can we do? Well like Eisenhower, we need better long range planning to keep our readers supplied with current books and periodicals. I often am faced with telling a patron that well, yes we had that collection last year, but

we stopped the subscription for something else. Certainly no one could have imagined the COVID crises would engulf us all, but hurricanes, floods and yes, earthquakes will come in the future. What we need is a robust multi-type library system in North Carolina that encourages sharing of resources rapidly in case of crisis. This will cost money, but the citizens of North Carolina deserve the best 21st Century library service we can provide. We also need to review the special services that were introduced during the COVID crises and see if they are things that we might want to keep on our offering plate in the future.

Interestingly these services can often bridge state and international boundaries. For example I enjoy attending the University of Michigan Clements Library “Bookworm” sessions which are attended by people from around the world and open to anyone at <https://clements.umich.edu/public-programs/the-clements-bookworm-recordings/>

Libraries have been very innovative during this time; let’s keep these initiatives open and shared with others so we can continue to reach out to populations that have not traditionally interacted with library services.

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