

ONONDAGA COUNTY PUBLIC LIBRARY SYSTEM  
11/28/11

With the recent addition of the Skaneateles Library, the Onondaga County Public Library System (OCPL) now includes all 32 public libraries in Onondaga County. The libraries range from small rural to large suburban to the 121,374 square foot Central Library in downtown Syracuse.

OCPL has fostered collaboration since 1962 – a task made easier by our geographically compact area in Central New York. Because Onondaga County is only 35 miles long by 30 miles wide, our two vans are able to make deliveries to all libraries five days a week. Library staff can also easily collaborate face-to-face in work groups and at the annual system retreat.

Funding and administration is similar to other urban-based systems. The OCPL system and the Central Library are largely funded by New York State and Onondaga County. System services are housed at the Central Library. City branch libraries are funded by the City of Syracuse but administered by OCPL. Libraries outside the city are independent members of the system supported by their local communities.

Funding for libraries within our county varies widely, making equity of access to resources an important priority for us. To help improve equity of access, next year two unstaffed book dispensers will be placed in areas that are currently underserved. It's our first foray into this type of library service, and we're excited about it.

A second project in the works is a redesign of the Central Library. The current library opened in 1988 and is housed on five floors of a modern urban mall. Responding to changes in staffing levels, technology, and library use, we envision a right-sized library that will be more sustainable and flexible. We see the opportunity to foster staff/patron interactions through design choices, and to contribute to the revitalization of our city center. As system headquarters, we will be adding technology that will allow us to more efficiently serve libraries and patrons throughout the county.

New technologies have led to other new services. This year, OCPL added a mobile PAC, allowing patrons to use the library's catalog from their smart phones. Next year people will be able to pay fines with a credit card from their home computer.

As is happening throughout the library world, we're also responding to increased patron demand for electronic resources. In 2012, a one-time sum of \$100,000 was designated by Onondaga County for the purchase of digital content such as e-books that will be equally available to users of the smallest and largest member libraries.

One special service of which we're especially proud is our STAR Center, which serves the blind and visually impaired. In 2010, it saw a 120% increase in circulation of talking books, due to the ability of our staff to train users in new download technology.

Funding has been our biggest challenge in recent years. While all libraries have stayed open, we've had to reduce hours and services at the Central Library, closing three floors two hours a day. However, by continuing to enable collaboration and provide expertise, we are determined to enhance our core services of one library card for all libraries, one library catalog, and delivery of materials to 32 libraries five days a week.

Jane Suddaby- Onondaga County Public Library Trustee

I have been a trustee for eight years and have watched the use of libraries explode due to the current economic catastrophe. Our unemployed patrons are one of the highest populations we see now due to the fact that all of our local major employers will only accept online applications. As families become more economically stressed we see kids come in to use the technology to apply to colleges, also because colleges now request online applications. When our Central Library opens on the shortened hours, I have observed a line of people waiting to use the technology. Matter of fact, I have observed librarians assisting workers with resume development-a task many of these workers never had to undertake before. Libraries are not just agencies who receive funds; they are agencies who also function as economic engines.