



Central Rappahannock Regional Library

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All because of the legacy of one man...

These were the first words from the head of the Central Rappahannock Regional Library (CRRL) when I met her. Yes, this exceptional library got off the ground when Captain C Wistar Wallace, who fought in the Civil War, left \$15 000 to the City of Fredericksburg to establish a public library. After his death in 1907, his will stipulated how the money should be used and the conditions that had to be met. The first priority was a building. The first library building was built on the corner of Princess Anne and George Streets. It opened its doors on Monday, December 5, 1910. Today this building houses the Fredericksburg City Public School Board Offices.

In 1968 a new demonstration library was started. A Board of Trustees from Spotsylvania County, King George County, Westmoreland County, Caroline County and Fredericksburg was formed to discuss the need for a central state library. Initially the community was served by the Fredericksburg Library and two book mobiles. The size of the area required extensive travelling. Despite the fact that the library was remodelled to a three storey building with a basement in 1990, 50% of the non-fiction stock has to be stored in a nearby building. Caroline and King George Counties are no longer part of this system.

Best of the best

An article in **American Libraries** ranked CRRL as the number one public library for its size in the state of Virginia, and number seven in the United States overall. The CRRL topped over 320 libraries for its efficient use of taxpayer money in the delivery of library services. It serves a population of 250 000. Rankings were determined by the number of patron visits, checkouts, and information requests. This is the fourth year running that the CRRL has ranked in the top ten in the Hennen American Library Ratings (HAPLR) system and the first year in the number one spot in Virginia. The Central Rappahannock Regional Library truly serves a community of readers. Remarkable!

Outreach programmes

So what makes this library's achievements so special? A full-time coordinator and four people are responsible for the outreach programmes. This includes the bookmobiles, books by mail service, adult literacy programme, and regional system for the blind and physically-handicapped programme. They also have a Braille typewriter.

Law Library

An unusual feature of this library is that it has a fully-fledged law library, situated on the ground floor that is used by the legal fraternity and the public.

Virginia Room

This room houses all the information on local history and genealogy. Virginia is one of the oldest states in the United States and people flock here from all over to trace their roots. The area around Fredericksburg played a major role in the history of the country. This facility proves to be very well used.

Juvenile Library

I always believe and maintain that the Children's Library is the hub of the public library. The CRRL juvenile section does not disappoint. They host numerous activities and programmes besides their usual library duties. Rebecca Purdy, youth services manager, assured me that the extra activities would not have been possible had it not been for very dedicated, enthusiastic, passionate and committed staff that consists of nine regular, three full-time and six part-time workers. They are all involved in the successful planning and presenting of the programmes. They have the full commitment and support of the administration to run their programmes with no budget constraints. They do not have a specific budget for their programmes, as long as the programmes are up and running and successful. The Friends of the Library are a great asset.

Regular programmes include 15 minute *New born baby lap reading* sessions. The mother brings her child to the library and a short story is read to them. The mothers then stay for an hour or so after the programme to talk and mingle. These children become life-long readers and an appreciation for the written word is instilled from a very young age. They also present a Head-start programme and for the slightly older readers, there is a Boys and Girls Club.

There is considerable interaction between the library and schools. The staff attend family evenings at schools to read or tell stories, sign people up for library cards or display new material available in the library. Every month Grade K to 6 has Fabulous Friday sessions, during which they discuss a book and design artwork to complement the book they have read.



They also offer a Teen-Council programme. It entails a group of teens that meet regularly with the librarians to give advice about programmes, new magazines and music on the market. Their suggestions are taken seriously which is also one of the reasons why they have such a good success rate with teens. A local drama teacher and his students provide informal drama training. This library has much to offer and is well loved by the community - small wonder that they attend meetings in their hundreds when there are talks of budget cuts from the powers that be.

Internet service

The library also offers a free Internet service to the public - a service that is well used. Users have to sign up and can use the Internet for an hour per session. The time can be extended if there is not a queue. Bill Gates provided the money for the 12 computers and the software in the Gates Laboratory.

Instruction on computer usage is provided free of charge.

Web site

It comes as no surprise that the CRRL's network of web sites has won awards, been highlighted in conferences and that they have been nominated for presenting the best workshops. They are also mentioned in various media and web articles. The library has developed an impressive network of sites to point patrons in the right direction. www.librarypoint.org provides access to general library information and services.

Other sites in the CRRL network offer resources by subject or audience. One can access the library's on-line reference service at www.answerpoint.org. Local history buffs can uncover the past at www.historypoint.org, while art lovers can surf www.artspoint.org to keep up with local dance, theatre, gallery exhibitions and more. www.teenspoint.org and www.kidspoint.org offer loads of resources for their respective audiences. As part of its mission to provide community information, CRRL hosts numerous sites for free.

STATISTICS

(Collective statistics of the seven branches)

The CRRL system consists of seven different branches that serves the City of Fredericksburg, Stafford and Westmoreland Counties.

Collection

Total stock	575 176
Books	371 261
Paperbacks	55 440
Sound recordings	34 970
Videos	26 112
Added titles	50 601
Added volumes	105 091

Circulation

Items circulated	6 061 750
Reserves processed	96 539
Interlibrary loans	5 286
Reference transactions	779 953

Outreach programmes

Book talks at schools	1 309
Students reached	44 418
Teacher deposits	6 606

One can also sign up for the library's online monthly newsletter for news on the library, new books, programmes offered, information about new items added to the web site, et cetera.

Snippets

There is no limit to the number of books that can be borrowed. The loan period is two weeks and one can extend one's loans, reserve copies of books, and apply for membership via the Internet!

Students can go online to get Live Homework Help through the library's web site. They connect with real tutors online in sessions for up to 20 minutes. This service is available from Sunday (yes the library is open on Sundays) to Thursday between

15h00 to 22h00. Other options are to e-mail, phone or chat online with a librarian who is standing by with web site links, photocopies and book recommendations to solve research needs.

As Willard Scott said, 'Librarians have always been among the most thoughtful and helpful people. They are teachers without a classroom. No libraries, no progress!'

Note: The CRRL has so much to offer that I really cannot do justice in one article to this great organisation. I met many wonderful people and would like to thank Sue Willis and Becky Purdy for their assistance.

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