



### Brooks Free Library Nurtures Community

by Suzanne Martell

In the last year, the media has lamented the death of the printed page on numerous occasions. Books, newspapers and magazines are being replaced by more and more online media sources. One might assume that venerable institutions such as libraries are fast becoming dinosaurs, obsolete in the light of the new media age. That assumption would be wrong. In Harwich the number of people using Brooks Free Library continues to grow every year.

Brooks Library is now the second busiest of the 34 circulating locations in the Cape Libraries Automated Materials Sharing (CLAMS) consortium. Last year alone, our patrons checked out 211,719 books, audiobooks, videos, magazines, and other materials, compared to 193,024 items the previous year. Of the materials borrowed, 62% were books and about 30% were videos and DVDs. Book circulation increased by 9.7%, at a time when public perception says the general population is reading less.

But the library is more than just books. It's become a community gathering place and WiFi hotspot in Harwich, with residents and visitors coming in to read the newspapers and magazines, attend a program or use a computer. Parking space is often at a premium, with overflow parking at Town Hall and Brooks Park.

The Library has a fast connection for our public computers, provided free by Comcast. Our wireless internet service is available 24-hours a day, and – like other library services – it's free! The bandwidth available to wireless users will vary depending on the number of users connected, though most users won't notice any slow down unless it's an exceptionally busy day. Signal strength can be affected by obstructions such as walls and trees, so users try different areas to find a good spot.

Outside, we have seating along Main Street and on the parking lot side of the library. Our front porch provides protection from wind, rain and the sun's glare, with comfortable Adirondack chairs and a good view of who's passing by. Walk over to one of Harwich Center's cafes or shops to pick up some refreshments to enjoy while using the wireless service.

Brooks Free Library has professionally trained Reference and Youth Services Librarians who are available to meet a patron's need for information as well as serve children and their caregivers.

While the library staff greatly appreciates their current group of dedicated volunteers, the recent increase in circulation and visitors means additional community members are needed. There are many different ways to volunteer and become part of the library team, and most take only an hour or two of time each week.

For instance, help is always needed with the ongoing task of returning books and other materials to their proper locations. "Shelvers" normally work a set schedule of two hours per week. These volunteers may also make phone calls to let users know a book they've requested has returned and is ready for pick-up. Some shelvers prefer to specialize in non-fiction, which uses Dewey Decimal numerical call numbers; others prefer fiction, where items are shelved alphabetically by the author's last name.

The Children's Department is especially in need of volunteer shelvers, and volunteers are also needed to put new magazines out on display and keep the back issues organized and under control! With school starting up again, another volunteer opportunity is tutoring.

Individuals who have experience with children are needed to tutor students, helping with homework or specific assignments. Anyone interested in helping these students will need a CORI check, a simple paperwork process to ensure the children's safety.

An area always in need of volunteers is Computer Tutoring for all ages. These tutors spend an hour at a time providing one-on-one help to people with questions about using the computer.

Currently, there are two individuals performing this role, but more volunteers would mean more patrons would be able to receive this service. Tutors can either volunteer for a general computer tutoring session or specialized sessions on email, searching the Internet or word processing.

Tutors don't need to commit to volunteering every week, but need a set schedule so the library can advertise the sessions. If you have good computer skills and a little time to spare, many community members would greatly appreciate this service.

Another popular program is Books on Wheels, run by the Friends of the Brooks Free Library. This group of volunteers delivers library materials to homebound patrons and others in Harwich who have difficulty reaching the library. We're especially in need of helpers who would be willing to bring new bags of books to these patrons and pick up the bags from the last delivery. Books on Wheels runs on the second and fourth Thursday of the month from 12:00 – 2:30 p.m., and volunteers only need to commit to deliver once every month or so.

With so much to offer, is it any wonder that the library has become so popular? It's not just about books. It's about serving the people of our community, and helping them get what they need.

If you're interested in joining our team of volunteers, please call Suzanne at 508-430-7562, or stop in and fill out a Volunteer Form at the Library.

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