

The notion that calling something a *library* makes it sound old, while calling the same facility a *learning center* or *community knowledge center* is, frankly, embarrassing. Librarianship is not a dying profession. It is a vibrant one in an age of unimaginable change.

The class of 2010 could not imagine a world without broadband, homework without the Internet, or the notion that some media just can't be found online. Within the span of a generation we went from Napster to the Pirate Bay. A generational shift from content hunters to content gluttons. The digital divide has, for many, become a deluge.

Here's a question for you Mr. President: What is free anymore? What forms of entertainment, enjoyment, or enlightenment are free? What place combines all three for citizens of every age group and education level? Where can you get your tax information, pick up a copy of *La Vita Nuova*, sign your daughter up for storytime, and take a class in Mediterranean cooking? I won't leave you hanging Mr. President, as you're

no doubt well-aware I'm tooting the rather ironically loud horn of the public library.

We are hurting Mr. President. Some libraries are staggering hours. Others are consolidating jobs. Still others are cutting back on expenditures and programming. This isn't simply the sad outcome of the economic tide washing over yet another profession, this is short-selling the future.

A generation of children whose parents are already struggling cannot turn to the library for support. Their parents cannot use the vast resources of the library to find jobs or better themselves during this long, deep recession. What of those in greatest need—the elderly, the homeless, or foreign people who turn to the library to contact distant family members? No, the doors have not closed yet, but they've begun to narrow.

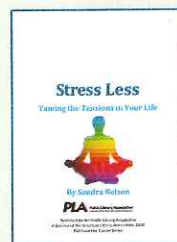
Look, I can bore you with facts and figures about the return on investment one finds in libraries. Or how young adults who stop using libraries are less likely to be lifelong

readers. Or how the annual budget of most libraries barely exceeds what it costs the Secret Service to take you and Vice President Biden to Steak N' Shake but I won't do that.

I will say that whenever I hear you speak about communities working to prevent youth violence, or our young people's gaps in science and mathematics, I sometimes yell "libraries!" very loudly at the screen.

Yes, librarians do get loud, Mr. President. We're a profession of highly educated, extremely dedicated, sharply dressed, information-addicted purveyors of wit, wisdom, and knowledge. We trace our roots back to Alexandria and draw a through line into the deep future of archives the size of planets. We are the brave and simple line in the sand between the forces that would say "you may know this, but not that" and true freedom. We don't ask for much, but we need your help Mr. President. We need you to save the libraries. In turn, libraries will save the world. ☐

New PLA Train the Trainer Kit!



Stress Less: Taming the Tensions in Your Life is one of a series of electronic publications in PLA's Train the Trainer Series. This training program, written by Sandra Nelson, has been designed to provide all levels of library staff with the information and skills they need to identify the major stresses in their lives and to manage them more effectively. The kit includes all of the materials needed to present a one-day (4 to 4.5 hours) training program for library staff members. *Stress Less* includes masters for participant handouts, a PowerPoint presentation to be used by the trainer, a detailed script, an evaluation form, and a training manual.

The audience for these electronic training publications includes state library consultants, regional and system consultants, trainers working in metropolitan libraries, independent trainers, library managers, and anyone else who has some responsibility for training library staff. Inexperienced trainers will be able to use these materials to deliver an effective training program by carefully following the script and handout instructions. Experienced trainers will be able to modify the materials to fit their personal training styles and to meet the unique needs of the people they are training. This digital download (Item Number: 978-0-8389-8545-8) is \$45 and can be ordered at www.alastore.ala.org. ☐

SCIENCE Education

IN PUBLIC LIBRARIES

THE MINNESOTA SCIENCE MUSEUM COLLABORATION

CHAD LUBBERS is the branch manager of three libraries in the Washington County (Minn.) Public Library System; chad.lubbers@co.washington.mn.us. He is reading *Growing Up on the Spectrum: A Guide to Life, Love, and Learning for Teens and Young Adults with Autism and Asperger's* by Lynn Kern Koegel and Claire LaZebnik; *The PLA Reader for Public Library Directors and Managers*; and listening to *A Long Way from Chicago* by Richard Peck.

In May 2009, the Washington County Library (WCL) in Woodbury, Minnesota, launched a children's program to encourage scientific investigation into the natural world. The program, called the Collectors' Corner Neighborhood Trading Post (CCNTP), is a partnership with the Science Museum of Minnesota (SMM), located in downtown Saint Paul. The library's program is a satellite site of CCNTP, originally created by the SMM in the early 1970s. CCNTP was designed to foster informal science education through the exploration and examination of the natural world.

The original CCNTP was discontinued in the mid-1970s due to staffing issues—but was given new life in 1999 when SMM moved into a new facility. Revamped and revitalized with additional staffing and dedicated volunteers, the new CCNTP quickly became a must-see interactive program for children. Since 1999, this CCNTP program has attracted more than eleven thousand participants from around the state of Minnesota.

In the early 2000s, SMM staff began investigating new ways to expand the reach and scope of SMM programming into local communities around the Twin Cities.

In 2008 Eric Jolly, president of SMM, gave testimony at a U.S. congressional hearing on the value of museums and libraries in strengthening communities. Jolly expressed his desire to expand museum services into local communities, specifically identifying public libraries as his ideal partners in any such endeavor.¹

In 2007–08, the SMM secured a private foundation grant to begin the expansion of select SMM programs into local communities. The CCNTP program was flagged as a longstanding SMM exhibit that was uniquely suited for replication at the community level.

SMM staff initially considered a variety of other community organizations as potential partners in their expansion efforts, including nature preserves, community centers, local colleges and universities, and public schools.

Unlike these other institutions, however, Minnesota's public libraries offered the benefits of extended, year-round hours of service, general (and free) access to all members of the public, and the potential for on-site

Collect - Trade - Share - Discover



Collectors' Corner
NEIGHBORHOOD TRADING POST



Be curious! Explore the natural world!

Find an object in nature, learn about it, visit the trading post, share your knowledge and make a trade—what a great way to learn about the world!

For more information:
www.smm.org/tradingposts
or e-mail us at ccs@smm.org

Summer Hours		R.H. Stafford Library 8595 Central Park Place Woodbury, MN 55125 651-731-1320	 
June	July		
Wednesdays 3-6 p.m.	Wednesdays 3-6 p.m.		
Saturdays 10 a.m.-1 p.m.	Fridays 3-6 p.m.		
	Saturdays 10 a.m.-1 p.m.		

Image 1: The Science Museum of Minnesota designed a graphic to brand the museum/library collaboration.

research using print and electronic resources.

The SMM approached the Metropolitan Library Service Agency (MELSA) in December of 2008 to discuss potential partnerships with local libraries. MELSA is a federation of city and county libraries in the Twin Cities metropolitan area. MELSA's service area includes 2.6 million residents who are served by 105 libraries from 8 multi-branch library systems.

The satellite location of the Collectors' Corner was to be named The Collectors' Corner Neighborhood Trading Post to reflect the community focus of the project.

SMM requirements for a CCNTP site included:

- library staff to liaise with SMM personnel on coordination of trading post;
- ability to recruit locally for volunteers to operate the trading post;

- space to accommodate a fixed display cabinet;
- space to serve as a trading post for the exchange of items;
- communication and marketing capability;
- access to technology; and
- print resources for research purposes.

WCL administration identified three of the nine system branches that could function as potential host sites for this program. After discussions with library managers, a proposal was submitted to SMM on behalf of the WCL Stafford Library in Woodbury.

The Woodbury library (as it is known) is housed in a multipurpose facility that features an indoor park, amphitheater, children's play area, and numerous public meeting rooms. The library is connected by walkways to the local YMCA and a senior housing facility. The library is also located along several city walking paths and has abundant parking.

The 24,000-square-foot Woodbury location is also the most-trafficked library in the WCL system (900,000+ circulation; 450,000+ visits per year). The high traffic volume was correctly anticipated to produce a steady stream of in-house visits—children who came to the library for books, media, and other materials, but who would end up staying to participate in the Collectors' Corner program.

In February of 2009, the SMM accepted the WCL proposal to be the first of two sites planned for the Twin Cities region. The library and museum planned for a grand opening during the first weeks of June, coinciding with the library's kickoff of the 2009 Summer Reading Program.

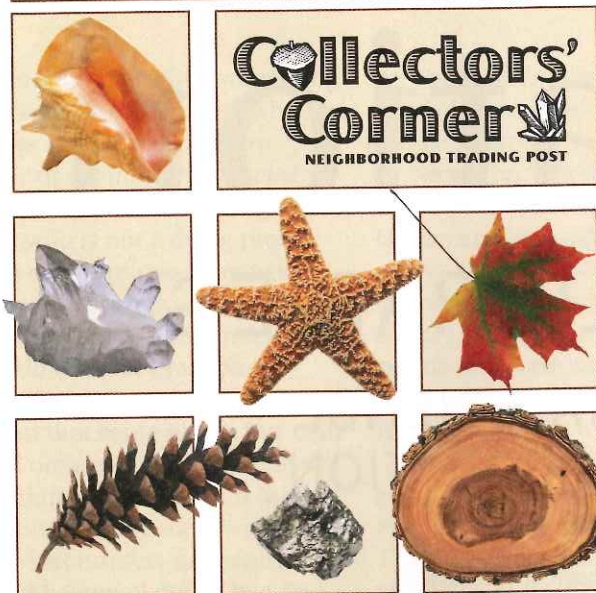
Building the Corner

Initial plans to install the satellite station of the Collectors' Corner in a remote wing of the Woodbury library were quickly dropped in favor of placing museum materials in a corner of the children's room. This brought the Collectors' Corner activities forward into a much more visible portion of the library, providing SMM volunteers direct access to the children who are the primary audience for this program.

The library removed two extraneous shelving units in the children's area and refinished the wall surfaces. A picture rail was hung to allow for the display of bulletin boards. These bulletin boards, in turn, would feature maps, posters, and other science-related materials pertaining to the Collectors' Corner program.

SMM purchased a 6' x 4' glass fronted display to showcase items up for trade. The glass display case

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R.H. Stafford Library
8595 Central Park Place
Woodbury, MN 55125
651-731-1320



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was filled, months in advance of the grand opening, with a variety of items from the Collectors' Corner flagship site at the SMM itself. Materials originally on display included: a cow's skull, numerous fossils, quartz, geodes, insects, snake sheds, seashells, and sand samples.

The visibility of this display generated a lot of early buzz about the program as curious children and parents asked what the display items were for.

Storage and media carts were purchased to house a variety of materials, including the SMM laptop used to track trading post transactions. SMM volunteers also have a variety of tabletop science games, activities, and materials designed to give younger children the opportunity for hands-on experience with fossils, rocks, sand, animal skulls, and shells.

SMM also purchased a small freezer for staff use at the CCNTP site. Museum conservation standards require any biological items intended for display to be sterilized in a subfreezing environment. Subsequently, all organic items tendered at the CCNTP are now placed in "temporary storage" for sterilization prior to public display and eventual trade. This lockable freezer is housed in a staff work area rather than in the library's public commons.

A standardized graphic was created by SMM staff for use in branding the Collectors' Corner promotional materials, including flyers, bookmarks, and large posters (see image 1). SMM staff also created several READ posters for library display (see image 2). These posters feature one of the SMM interns standing in front of a stegosaurus skeleton while holding a horned skull and *The Skull Alphabet Book*. Promotional materials were displayed and distributed at library events in the months leading up to the CCNTP grand opening.

Volunteer Training

The library and the SMM collaborated on the recruiting and training of volunteers. Both the library and the SMM posted calls for volunteers in-house and on their respective websites. Volunteers needed to be at least sixteen years of age and able to attend several training and orientation sessions in advance of the program launch.

The SMM relies heavily on volunteers at their Saint Paul headquarters location, logging over 56,000 hours of volunteerism in 2009 from a pool of more than 1,900 volunteers. Consequently, the SMM volunteer coordinators and trainers have streamlined the volunteer recruitment and training process to an extremely high degree.

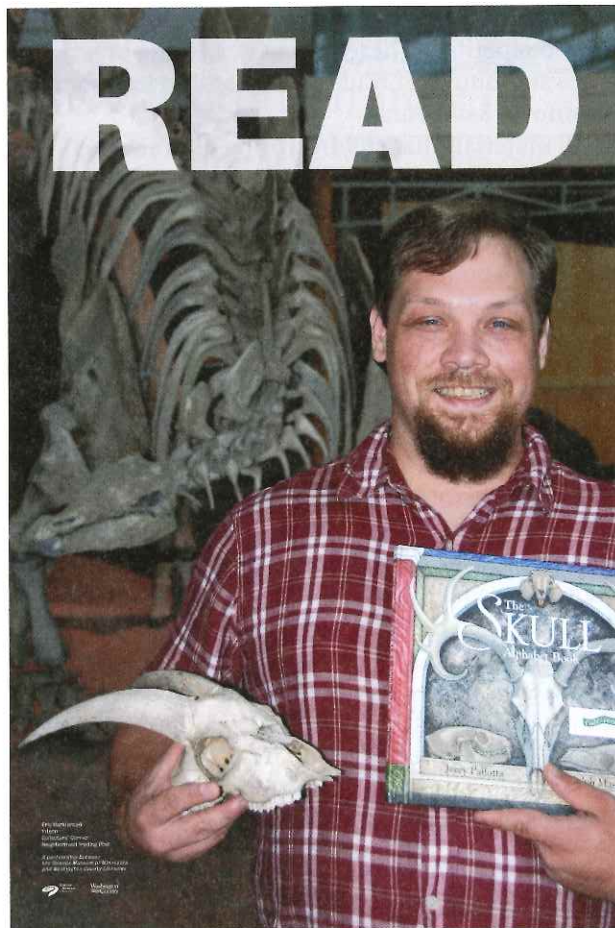


Image 2: SMM intern Erik Harkleroad with "Yorik" hosted a children's library program on bone and skull identification.

Volunteer applications for the CCNTP project were taken at both the SMM and at the library. These applications were then cycled through SMM's rigorous screening process to create an eligible pool of applicants for the CCNTP program.

Successful volunteer candidates attended three training sessions: a general orientation class at the SMM headquarters in downtown Saint Paul, a library orientation session, and a team-taught training session outlining the operation of the CCNTP site. Ongoing training sessions are offered, as needed, throughout the year.

Trading Structure

Conceptually, the Collectors' Corner program is a self-sustaining model. Young "traders" collect materials to exchange for materials collected by other traders. The inventory housed at the library renews itself as children bring in more and more materials to exchange. SMM staff do, however, add new materials

to the trading post to prevent inventory from becoming too repetitive. These new materials are often items submitted for trade at the flagship location in downtown Saint Paul.

All materials that children bring for trade are assessed and awarded a point value by SMM volunteers. Point values are awarded both for the uniqueness of an item and for the knowledge that children can share about the items they collect.

For example, a child who says, "This is a rock I found on my uncle's farm" might receive 100 points for his find. The same child could report that "this is a rock I found on my uncle's farm. It has a piece of fossilized coral in it. Coral grows underwater. So this rock might be from the Devonian period, when this part of Minnesota was under water, over 380 million years ago." This latter statement demonstrates a much more in-depth knowledge of the item for trade. Consequently, the SMM volunteer may award the child 1,000 points for doing the extra legwork in tracking down this information on the fossil.

The SMM starts a trading account for each child who makes at least one trade at the CCNTP. As children make more and more trades for materials, they accrue more and more points for their efforts.

Items the children trade are first sterilized in the

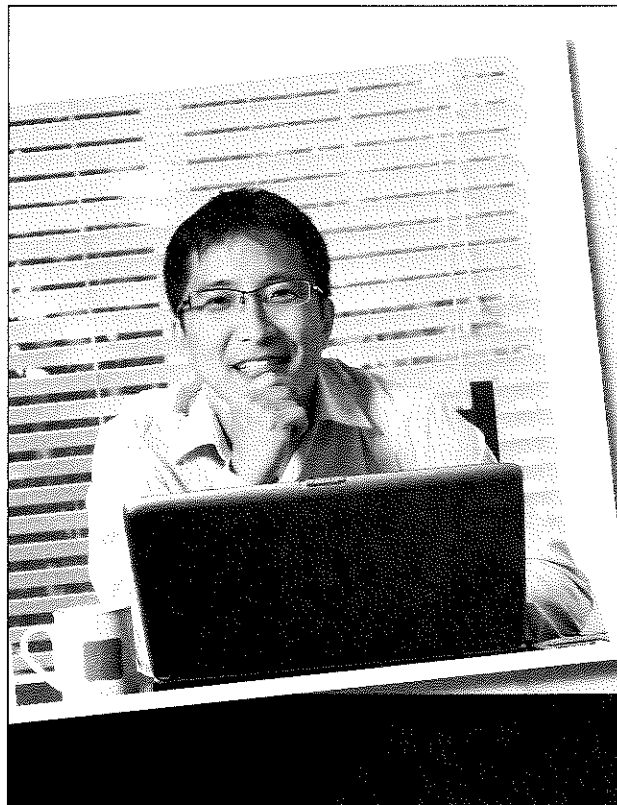
chest freezer for a two-week period. After removal from cold storage, items are placed in the glass display case, with a small tag attached to it. This tag lists the "trade-in points" a child would need to accrue in order to take the object home.

Volunteers are taught strategies for encouraging children to do a bit more research in order to gain more points for their materials. Having this satellite location housed in a public library, therefore, becomes a key component in directing kids to books, media, or online resources where they can find additional information.

The point-of-trade has also become an ideal venue for a bit of on-site education about the legalities of "collecting" from the natural world.

One of the goals of the Collectors' Corner programs is to educate children on how to avoid damaging nature while attempting to study it. A short list of acceptable items for trade is posted online. The list includes: rocks, shells, pine cones, fossils, seeds, insects, clean bones and skulls (no flesh attached), or a shed snakeskin.

Likewise, certain materials are prohibited by state and federal law from being tendered for trade. These include: bird feathers, eggs, and nests; taxidermy animals or animal pelts; anything from a protected or



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endangered species; mollusks from the St. Croix and Mississippi Rivers; live animals (including siblings); and wildflowers.

SMM volunteers are trained to be supportive of the children who visit with items to trade. Items brought in are never denigrated and children receive strong encouragement and validation from each of the volunteers for their efforts.

During the summer months, the library's satellite site was open for business three days per week. With community children returning to school in the fall, the CCNTP hours were reduced to just two days per week.

Staff Commitment

One part-time librarian was assigned to work with the SMM on this project. She is responsible for the coordination of joint volunteer training efforts, and she is also the on-site liaison with volunteers who work the trading post each week.

This staff person's initial time commitment was several hours per week during the planning and design phase of the CCNTP. With the program up and running smoothly for the past six months, her time commitment has dropped to approximately one hour per week.

Results


The principal appeal of the partnership with the SMM was the opportunity to increase the library's participation in science education. Like all public libraries, the Washington County Libraries have a proven track record in the area of early literacy education. The Woodbury branch hosts other programs throughout the year, including ESL classes, PC application classes, rotating art exhibits, and dozens of other activities. But the SMM collaboration positioned us to work directly with children to develop science literacy skills.

After the first three months, the library's CCTNP had logged over 250 children who had made at least one trade. Most of the traders are between the ages of eight and fourteen with some children as young as four visiting the trading post.

In addition to the regularized trading post activities, the SMM staff and volunteers have also collaborated to present additional science-themed programs at the library, including, to date, a skull and bone identification program and a variety of science-themed storytime events.

These programs incorporate traditional storytime features like storytelling and fingerplays, but also include science demonstrations or activities and discussions about the science behind everyday objects and events. These storytimes are also a venue for SMM volunteers and children's librarians to discuss additional books and activities that parents and children can use to foster science literacy skills at home.

Following the success of this first satellite Collectors' Corner Neighborhood Trading Post, the SMM has now launched a second satellite location at the Saint Paul Public Library—with plans to expand and duplicate the CCNTP sites in public libraries throughout the state of Minnesota.

The Washington County Libraries are also currently enjoying a small renaissance of scientific exploration among the youngest users. 

Reference

1. Examining the Role of Museums and Libraries in Strengthening Communities, 110th Congressional Congress, 2nd Session, 35, testimony of Dr. Eric Jolly (2008).