

The Librarian's Desk . . .

STREAM is the Library's version of STEM. Libraries mix Reading and Art with the Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM) educational prerogatives of our competitive nation because we are part of the culture sector. STREAM is a fitting acronym that stands for our efforts to aid the confluence of culture and technology in public library programming, and to ascertain that access flows to the community.

Our Library officials reconnoitered technology trends this year to help define the programmatic details of the soon-to-be renovated, updated and expanded Library and gauge where people are headed with prevailing technology.

The idea to assess where technology is taking us began with Library Trustee Bruce Eckman and his Technology Committee members Jim Murphy, Sarah O'Connell, and me. Bruce identified representatives from several sectors to interview about technology and public service. Bruce conducted 20 in-depth interviews and several visits with the Committee participating. He interviewed three librarians from Dover and Sherborn public libraries; two librarians from private schools (Dana Hall and Cushing Academy); four librarians from private universities (three from Harvard, one University of Vermont); three librarians from Pine Hill, Dover-Sherborn Middle and Regional High Schools; one entrepreneur who works in the technology space; three students from the three Sherborn schools; one student returning from their first semester at college; and three parents who have children in the three Sherborn schools.

Some common themes occurred in the interviews, and Bruce compiled the results and recommendations. Here is synopsis of the Committee's findings:

"Today's world is fragmented and technology is accelerating that fragmentation, thus technology is changing us and relationships are more transactional. Cognitive thinking is becoming more rapid and shallow; whereas it used to take research weeks, Google and Wikipedia take about 30 seconds of concentration. Technology has changed libraries, which used to facilitate the finding of information - libraries now facilitate the creation of information. The immediacy of technology drives the interests and ultimately the satisfaction of users who no longer wish to wait for the moment's most popular book, but will find the means to acquire it quickly and might have no second choice to substitute. Today's library works to integrate opposing forces, can be a place to escape the hum of technology while also embracing it. Libraries are challenged to balance the role as a quiet place to withdraw from the demands of the day to recharge with the need for access to technology and social interaction, more like a social media construct. And though technology fragments our present, it can preserve the past in today's disposable culture."

As to the future of reading, our interviews made clear that libraries must adhere to the mission to preserve the immersive quality of reading which engages the mind and imagination in a way no "information processing" can do. Young adult borrowing is on the rise, influenced by popular culture and social networking. Adequate copies or broader digital access must capture the demand and librarians must find inroads to help spark more demand of read-alikes or lesser known works. In short, libraries must continue to inspire using both physical space and intellectual content.

To keep up with access tools, I attended a program titled "Access-Ability 2014: Improving Library Access for the Future." Brian Charlson, the Director of Technology for the Carroll Center for the Blind, spoke about "Choices, Choices, Choices: What Device to Use to Access e-Books as a Blind Person" and Kelly Dunn, visual specialist from the VA spoke on services to veterans with vision impairment. When Brian and Kelly talked about the future, they were enthused to demonstrate how today's mainstream devices

such as the iPad, iPod, Smart Phones, and some tablet improvements incorporating universal design are integrating access. By the time we are ready for the next round of technology at the Library, assistive technology should be aptly built in to popular devices to meet our criteria.

Some of the more futuristic attributes to consider in our program designs may include technology for publishing and maker-spaces. "HOMAGO" (hang-out-mess-around-geek-out) creative space will be set up in the Mezzanine Teen Tech Lab, supported by the Friends and dedicated to them for their many years of advancing Library services.

Our findings on library services are not all new, they are only wearing new skins, and must be made recognizable. For example, if a pedestrian were asked to give a second thought to libraries, the programming and cultural facets may not come to mind as quickly as the book lending program. A significant amount of time is devoted to arranging public programming, including the Friends' voluntarism that raises all of the funds to make programs happen.

Takers are many: twice as many adults attended our workshops for hands-on art and crafts, lectures, computer instruction, writing, book clubs, and games. Nearly 600 people participated compared to 293 last year. We attribute part of this rise to offering more programs in series rather than one-time programs that returned some regrets from patrons having time conflicts. Also, Public Services Librarian Donna Bryant did a first rate job of selecting high quality programs on a small budget. But, on the whole, the increase indicates that library users have a thirst to share learning experiences here.

Our goal is to be ready for tomorrow in our renovated Library. Tomorrow hasn't been invented yet, as Bruce points out in his report. But today, we have the style and the wits about us to help invent tomorrow. Thank you, Bruce, Jim, and Sarah for your many hours of time spent contemplating the Library of tomorrow. Thank you, Friends of the Library, for your current and constant refreshing of the STREAM in our service.

Your Librarian,

Elizabeth Johnston