

Worthington Libraries

“2007 Library of the Year”

By Carrie Pauling

They are outstanding, but it was also part determination that earned Worthington Libraries the top spot: 2007 National Library of the Year. How did they get there? According to Lisa Fuller, Community Relations/Development Director, it was a “winning combination” of “excellent services, materials, and programs provided by a staff that continually goes the extra mile, led by a director who is focused on the future, guided by a dedicated and thoughtful board, and supported by a community that values education and lifelong learning.” Is that all?

Worthington Libraries, a three-library system in a community nearby Columbus, Ohio, has been a runner-up for the award four times. In a clear presentation to the Library Journal, Fuller outlined their case, including service to the community, creativity and innovation, circulation, and leadership.

Serving The Community

Beyond hoping to be selected as Library Journal’s Library of the Year, Fuller says they strive to be their community’s “library of the year” every day. They spend wisely, listen to their patron’s needs, and provide what they want in an easy-to-find fashion. “Our patrons overwhelmingly want books,” says Fuller, who notes that about 84 percent of their entire collection is books, and that circulation is up nearly nine percent over last year.

Rising circulation is a trend that is not new to Worthington Libraries. Fuller attributes this in part to a new customer service model that was implemented in 2006. A workgroup was charged with “exploring the range of possible ways to meet the information needs of our patrons in the most efficient, effective, and thorough manner, paying particular attention to services that were proactive.” That research led to the implementation of roving reference and better merchandising of their materials. “We noticed that any time staff was out circulating, they came back with lots of reference questions—patrons were more likely to grab someone walking by than to approach the big desk. We realized we need to be there at what we call the ‘point of puzzlement’ to effectively answer their needs,” says Fuller. During renovations in two of their libraries, they decreased the size of the main reference desk and added roving stations throughout the collection.

In addition, they made the collection “more browse-able,” according to Fuller, arranging popular materials on “power walls,” adding better signage, and upgrading the self check-out stations.

They consider their Web site their fourth location, offering 24/7 information to visitors. According to their application, “It was the first Web site to win the netConnect award for a small public library Web site and it is maintained by a Webmaster and two staff work teams: the Digital Library Team and Electronic Resources Team.” A popular feature on the Web, library Webcasts draw a surprising number of visitors. “Leading up to the holiday season, the Mayor of Worthington read *The Night Before Christmas*. And in late fall we welcomed author John Green in for an author talk. Our Webcast of his talk received over 10,000 views once it was posted.”

Growth and Expansion

The Worthington Park Library, the newest of the three libraries, grew from a need to serve patrons in the northeast part of their service area, and had been in the plans for more than 12 years before it opened this past April, when funding became available. Designed with families and children in mind, the 5,000 square foot space houses a large children’s and teen collection. “Sixty-five percent of the collection is for





that audience,” says Wendy Rawson, Worthington Park Library manager. They also offer a Homework Help Center, which is unique in the system to the Worthington Park branch.

Planning an Opening Day Collection for this library was challenging due to the limited space. “Brodart helped by putting the lists together based on creating a popular collection for children and teens. They supplied a project coordinator and a librarian to build lists, and we made the final choice,” said Rawson. All said and done, Rawson joked that it was a little overwhelming. “Seeing numbers on paper is different than the actual books sitting on the floor! It was actually kind of fun.”

Worthington Libraries continue to get the most popular books, processed, through a subscription to TIPS and FastIPS. “We have one adult materials selector and one children’s materials selector for the three libraries,” says Anne Reilly, Technical Services Manager. “They go through the lists we receive from Brodart and finalize the titles.” Communication is great, she notes, both with the librarians and selectors within Worthington Libraries, and with staff at Brodart.

Creativity and Innovation

The list of programming available for the Worthington community is too lengthy to include here. From “Kindergarten Ready or Not” to “Touch-a-Truck”—for three- to seven-year-olds who want to get personal with big vehicles and machinery—to “Book and Bagel” for teens and “Behind the Bestseller” for adults, Worthington Library hosted 499 programs attended by 50,936 people in 2007. The value of literacy and education is impressed on every citizen, from babies to seniors. Fuller wrote in the Library of the Year application: “In partnership with local pediatricians, the Library distributes free Raising Readers packets that contain information on developing early childhood literacy skills, rhymes, and book recommendations.” Storytimes, teen programming, homework help, adult book groups, forums, workshops for career building, and more mean that a Worthington resident is supported from birth through his or her lifetime. “In 1803, settlers came to this area from New England—they came with books for a library they planned to open. So,” she says, “education has been very important to this community from the start.”

Investing in an Invested Staff

Customers tell Worthington Libraries that the “friendliness of the staff” is the most frequent reason noted for why they love their libraries. “Director Meribah Mansfield has made staff development a priority,” says Fuller. “A staff that’s allowed and encouraged to participate in ‘big picture’ planning is a staff that’s engaged, energized, and proud to be of service.”

An example of an engaged staff member at Worthington Libraries is Ann Pechacek, teen librarian, who decided to contact a school library media specialist in the school district to develop a program to get teens into the library to talk books. The result was “Book and Bagel,” a before-school (yes, that’s before—meaning 7:15 A.M.) program that regularly sees close to 20 students in the library before school to discuss books.

Warm, responsive, resourceful, innovative—all adjectives to describe the library and its staff. Therefore, it’s no great leap to add “Library of the Year” to the descriptors. “It was incredible,” says Fuller of the award. “Over 100 people were in the library at 7:30 A.M. to hear the announcement,” she says of when they shared their good news. Since, the library has been celebrating and holding themselves up to the title and task of being their patron’s “library of the year” every day.



Worthington Libraries Stats

- Location: Worthington, OH
- Web site: www.worthingtonlibraries.org
- Branches: 7 locations in 6 counties
- Collection size: 448,901 items (as of December 2007)
- Registered cardholders: 62,644
- Programs offered: 499 (50,936 in attendance)
- Public computers: 179 (this includes children’s computers without Internet access, adaptive computers)
- Staff size: 147 (110.53 Full-time equivalents)