



## Library a bright spot during tough times

Public libraries can provide some much needed sunshine during the economic gloom and doom encircling the globe. A wide range of services from children's programs to access to high-speed Internet, movies, books, magazines, music and newspapers make the library an attractive place to spend some time and save some money.

"History has shown that the deeper the recession, the more public libraries get used," says Western Counties Regional Library Director Trudy Amirault.

Regional library chair Gary Archibald concurs: "It has been observed many times that in period of economic downturn people increasingly make use of their public library."

"Whether it be to borrow ... a book, read newspapers or magazines, check out a DVD, use a computer for job hunting, complete an online application, make use of free wireless connections, or just escape the economic situation in a warm inviting location, public library branches are there for to all of us to use," he says.

The statistics back this up. Program attendance is up 43 per cent for children and up 78 per cent for adults in 2008-2009 over the previous year. User sessions for computers at the Yarmouth branch alone for January 08 was 6,016 versus 12,145 for January 2009 – up more than 50 per cent. Regionally DVD circulation was 26,510 in 2007-08 from April through January versus 32,947 for the same 10 months in 2008-09. Overall circulation (all library materials) is up three per cent in January 2009 versus January 2008.

Many of the library clerks at the regional library's 10 branches believe there has been a rise in library use, especially among people accessing the public computers and Internet.

"I see more people come in to use the computer service and wireless connection," says June Swift, library clerk for the Westport Branch Library on Brier Island. "I also have a



Western Counties Regional Library Director Trudy Amirault stands in front of the busiest area of the Yarmouth library, the public access computers. She notes that historically during tough times, more people use public libraries.

student taking Sylvan (Learning) online through our wireless connection. This saves on Internet bills for the student.”

She says more patrons are borrowing DVDs and requesting newly released books.

Pubnico Branch Library clerk Beatrice Adams puts it more simply: “Basically everything at the library is free.”

Adams says her patrons are beginning to promote library services among their peers to a greater extent, increasing public awareness of the many services available at the library.

Branches in Pubnico and Meteghan also offer extensive French collections.

“We have a great French collection for kids and the adult collection for French fiction is ongoing,” says Adams. “We have the newspapers the Chronicle Herald, the Vanguard and le Courrier (de la Nouvelle Écosse) that they can come in and sit at the tables and read.”

Programs are a big part of library services.

At many of the branches, there are parent and baby reading and activity programs, craft programs for all ages, book clubs, game nights and specialty programs covering everything from tax returns to travel.

Gone are the days when people are being asked to be quiet at the library.

“There is no longer the stigma of being shushed and silent in the library,” says Adams.

Library clerks know the province and have ready access to information on tourism, law, government agencies, schools and churches, she adds.

Libraries are a community meeting place, says Suzanne Gear, the senior library clerk at the McKay Memorial Library in Shelburne. “We have meeting rooms for non profit groups.”

Both Shelley Smith with the Clark’s Harbour Branch Library and Heather Suttle of the Lillian Benham Library in Lockeport says there has been an increase in library usage, especially patrons using computers and borrowing DVDs.

“Perhaps it’s the weather, or the economy, but folks seem delighted to find us,” says library clerk Sara Weiser of the Digby library. “I think they are primarily drawn to the DVDs, but once we get them in the door we can show them a number of things that we can offer for free.”

Weiser’s co-worker Thelma Pulsifer believes her personal library use for materials such as books, movies and magazines saves her approximately \$40 a week.

“We certainly encourage people to use the library as that is the reason we exist, namely, to provide the resources, to assist and to serve. In these times, people are rediscovering the value of their public library,” concludes Archibald.