

Declining library use

Representing only one Laramie County Library patron, I can report that I have not checked out a single book from the new facility. At the former library location on Central Avenue, I regularly checked out a number of books at a time.

Why no more?

The new library is just too time-consuming and inconvenient and I don't have the time to park a great distance from either of the entrances and take elevators to floors with the nonfiction books I used to check out. I also don't have the time to read that I had before this publication became what it is today.

While I'm only one library patron, going from 50-75 books a year to none is quite a drop. Obviously, others have found the new library either inconvenient to get to or inconvenient in which to get around.

At the time a new library was being discussed, some cautioned that new technology would render libraries less attractive for reading or research materials. So, that should have been among the many considerations before \$25 million was requested to overbuild a new library in a location less suitable than the former one.

What can be done at this late stage? Very little to nothing. That horse is out of the barn. Have a cup of fresh Joe. Not having a PR person has had no effect on patrons not going to the new library to get reading materials or to attend meetings.

While the placement of my rack for the

Heralds so readers can pick up a Cheyenne Herald at the library is not the equal of the location it was in the former library, it has seemed to me all along that the library traffic was down. There may be more kids entering the library but I seriously doubt there are more adults coming there for purposes a library is intended.

Public computers available to children so they can send and receive e-mails is not all bad but even that attraction has not resulted in more use of the much larger facility in a more dangerous location.

Is it likely to improve?

No. Technology continues to make certain Twentieth Century offerings obsolete. As more and more people buy the new fads in electronics and as AT&T provides now-lacking Wyoming service for i-Phones, the shelves in the library will not beckon more readers. There is every possibility there might be fewer.

Obviously, a coffee counter is not an attraction that brings new or different people into the library area. Its placement allows downtown employees to visit the counter, then walk back out the same door they came in without entering the library area at all. Watching the traffic there, that is exactly the most common occurrence.

Librarians, even very experienced librarians, may be very familiar with the Library of Congress numbering system and, the older ones, the Dewey Decimal System but they do not have the management skills or experience to be put into a

position to make "business" decisions to justify a new, grandiose library in a city this size. Perhaps in Buford or Chugwater, but not in Cheyenne when the budget is as large as it has become.

I can't speak to book or magazine selection, not even newspaper reading area. I simply do not enter the library. The Cheyenne Herald newspaper rack is by the water fountain, down a hallway used by some patrons but a relatively small percentage. When I was personally placing issues of the Herald on the inside racks for the first few months the new facility was open, what I noticed first was how the carpet was dividing at seams. It has been a long time since I walked to the rear (it just didn't justify my time) so I don't know if the carpet has been replaced or if the state of disrepair has gotten progressively worse.

Daily newspapers are on the decline. If it weren't for the advertising flyers distributed to homes on Sunday, circulation in even good newspapers would have fallen even further. Readership for news has steadily declined. Younger citizens just do not read the newspaper like their parents and grandparents did. The failure of the Rocky Mountain News shocked many but more daily newspapers will fail. Specialty and weekly publications have a better chance for success and survival because they fill a local need that is no longer being filled by the dailies. If you look at the New York Times Best Seller

lists, you will see the same authors over and over, sometimes with more than one offering in the same Top Ten list. Readers who are not fans of that author or that type of "literature" just do not buy or read the book, best-seller or not.

The day is approaching when twenty authors will dominate the fiction section of booksellers and libraries. If you're not into them, you're out of luck. How many John Sanford, James Patterson, Danielle Steel, Dean Koonz, etc. books will it take for them to tell all their stories?

Nonfiction is worse. Most of the books making that list are single issue, fan seeking offerings from celebrities purporting to be newspeople.

Will the Laramie County Library have to become little more than a large computer lab to survive? If they do, they'll have to charge for usage and that will be counterproductive. Residents feel they've paid for the library, they shouldn't have to pay to use it. That is unlikely to be possible in the future - it will be no pay, no use.

Much like the daily built a new printing plant at the worst possible moment in time, a new library was built at the worst possible moment in time and it is now being confirmed how poor that timing and spending was. The old library was adequate. At least to me it was. If we still had it, I'd still be checking out books.

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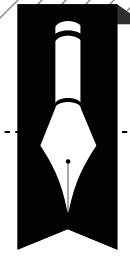
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