

To: Webster Public Library Board of Trustees

From: Diane Kozlowski and Melissa Painton

Re: Senior Services Proposal

Date: May 2, 2011

On April 18 and 19 we visited the Free Library of Philadelphia and the Osterhout Free Library in Wilkes-Barre, Pa. In the last couple of years, both of these libraries have established versions of a “senior space.” Building on what we learned from this field trip, we have put together the following plan.

Basic Proposal, Phase I, Part 1

To establish a dedicated, comfortable, and inviting area within the Library specifically designed for our users age 50 and over. This area will be known as “One Senior Place.”

Rationale

As the life span of the average American has increased, the definition of “senior” has changed. We intend to make resources available that target the transitional years of the 50’s and 60’s as well as the traditional seniors. Currently our resources are scattered around the building. Unlike the children and teens of our community, our older residents have no particular area to call their own. Additionally, they must physically navigate a large building to have full access to our collections. One Senior Place will be their “address” and will provide one basic access point for their needs.

Strategy

Our strategy is multifaceted. This will allow us to complete the majority of the project soon, and still give us time to thoughtfully execute Phase II.

One Senior Place will occupy the space adjacent to the Large Print collection. We see this as ideal since it is close to resources typically appealing to this age group: large print, recorded books, and videos. The four study tables currently there will be relocated to other parts of the building (See Part 2). The following components will be part of the space:

1. The most critical component of this space is the resources themselves. We will update and expand the relevant nonfiction and large print book collections. The core of this collection will be formed by pulling out appropriate subjects from adult nonfiction. Among other topics, these subjects will include: health and wellness, retirement, grandparenting, genealogy, personal finance, caregiving, careers, computers, estate planning, travel, and long-term care. We will also round out the collection with the addition of some media.
2. Shelving for regular and large print nonfiction. An added benefit of new shelving is the additional space created for expansion in the Large Print and adult nonfiction collections.
3. Shelving for magazines.

4. Comfortable chairs, end tables, lamps, round tables with seating, and a bench. Upholstered chairs would be moved from other areas of the Library. The 4 lounge chairs currently adjacent to the Large Print area would be reupholstered and used to replace the chairs we repurpose.
5. Small bulletin board and literature rack.
6. Signage.
7. Programming. We currently offer a variety of programs that appeal to this age group. Brochures will be made available in this space to publicize these programs.
8. A brochure that promotes the resources of One Senior Place.

Basic Proposal, Phase I, Part 2

The shifting of furniture necessary to create One Senior Place requires that we rethink how we use our public space and gives us an unprecedented opportunity to improve the placement of our collections and furniture. This part of the project would dramatically change the appearance of the front part of the Library. *While the basic proposal is not contingent on Part 2, it seems shortsighted not to take advantage of this opportunity.*

Rationale

These are the factors that suggest we rethink the use of the space from the Reader's Nook forward:

1. The nature of Reference work has changed dramatically in the last few years, enabling libraries to reduce their collections by a combination of making items circulating and/or removing them from the collection. I am working on such a weeding project now. It is clear that we will need much less space for this collection. This area of the Library is "prime real estate" and can be better used.
2. Our Reference Collection is currently housed on a combination of wall and freestanding shelving which was reused from our Van Ingen Dr. building. The wall shelving is unattractive and unsuited to our current needs.
3. The Reader's Nook provides resources that help patrons select their reading material. The Reference Staff is trained to assist patrons with this need (Reader's Advisory). It should be located closer to the Reference Desk.
4. The space adjacent to the computer area currently contains our new fiction and nonfiction, as well as express books and dvds on freestanding units. This space could be better used to highlight and display collections.

Strategy

1. Remove the wall shelving currently housing the Reference collection. Use a combination of purchased bookcases and existing counter height freestanding shelving to house this collection. The reconfigured Reference area would take up about ½ of the original space.
2. Relocate the "New" collections to the area originally occupied by the Reference Collection.
3. Relocate the Reader's Nook to the other half of this freed up area.
4. Relocate the study tables currently in the One Senior Place area to the former Reader's Nook.

Proposal, Phase II

We would be remiss if we did not acknowledge the role of technology in the lives of this age group. To address this need, we will expand our collection of computer related books and instructional manuals. We would also like to add outlets around the building to address the power source needs of the laptop and electronic gadget users that will be displaced by our new One Senior Place.

Still, there clearly remains a need for computer instruction. Based on our past experience and the combined wisdom of the libraries we visited, we envision a program of one-on-one computer instruction conducted by volunteers. The Osterhout Library in Wilkes-Barre has been running a very successful program using teen volunteers. The staff pointed out that this is an ideal group to work with seniors because they not only have expertise that they are willing to share, but it also creates an intergenerational dynamic that is good for the individuals involved as well as the community. Our plan is to earmark funds now for the purchase of 2 computers for use when we are ready to phase in this part of the project.

We are confident that an investment in this project would be enthusiastically received by the senior adults in our community. By expanding our focus on the use of space to other areas of the library, we will be able to offer an enhanced experience for the rest of our adult patrons as well.