

Multi-platform library access the way of the future, says CEO

The Internet and the digital drive are an opportunity for libraries to thrive rather than survive, said Tulsa City-County Library CEO Gary Shaffer. Having the ability to reach people on multiple platforms and myriad mediums helps the library system nationwide perform what Shaffer said is its true function.

“Our mission is lifelong learning—it’s not to be a book warehouse,” he said.

And within the four stories of the 135,000-SF Central Library at 400 Civic Center in downtown are plenty of possibilities for growth, of both the digital and brick and mortar variety.

“Our library and libraries nationally are busier than they’ve ever been. People are really using their libraries. There are folks out there that may think libraries are going away or that we’re not going to need libraries anymore. When the CD-ROM came out they said the same thing. You’re going to have a whole library in your house and you won’t need a library. So libraries have always dealt with this. What the Internet has allowed us to do is expand our tool belt,” said Shaffer.

So far the City-County system has made its expansion in the form of newer services. Earlier this month digital editions of the local, national and international magazines and newspapers were made available to library card holders through tulsalibrary.org.

Over the past few years the library has also provided access to free and legal music downloads (called “Freegal”), language learning software, downloadable eBooks and audiobooks, homework help and resume and interview help for those seeking work.

Factor in the City-County library application for smartphones and tablets and the courses available through the more than 20 libraries and it may seem that Tulsa’s system has gone about as far as it can go.

Not so, Shaffer said.

With the impending move of the Central Library to the old Homeland building, 1110 S. Denver Ave., will come some experimentation with digital cataloging systems, tablet availability, laptop computers and other modern innovations like 3D printers and digital recordings.

Recently dubbed the Librarium, the temporary library will open Labor Day weekend as the Central Library prepares to undergo a \$47.8 million renovation that will modernize the library with plenty of electric outlets and locations for people of all types to do more than just check out books.

Shaffer said libraries currently are for more than just bookworms, but for all types of people.

“We’re seeing a lot more business people at the library,” he said. “We’re seeing people do patent research, do story research and start nonprofits—I know of people who have started nonprofits right here. Those things libraries have been doing for a long time.”

He also said he hopes future renovations won’t just encourage innovation and socialization, but will also serve as a hub of capturing history in the making.

“I envision (the proposed media area) becoming recording studios,” Shaffer said. “But not just for recording music—it could be for telling a digital story—or, ‘I’m here with my grandfather and I want to capture his story for his descendents.’”

But for now the Central Library is preparing for its September move. «

Twitter: @ThadAyers