



2014 Entrepreneurship Day
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 and Love's Entrepreneurship Center
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THE JOURNAL RECORD > ALL-MOBILE-NEWS > STARTING A NEW CHAPTER: LIBRARIES SHIFTING ROLES WITH NEW TECHNOLOGIES

Starting a new chapter: Libraries shifting roles with new technologies

By [Kirby Lee Davis](#)
 Kirby Lee Davis is the Tulsa Bureau Chief for The Journal Record. Contact him at 918-295-4982, kirby.davis@journalrecord.com or @JKirbyLeeDavis.
 Posted: 05:09 PM Friday, February 7, 2014



[executive officer of the Tulsa City-County Library. \(Photo by Rip Stell\)" width="293" height="300" class="size-medium wp-image-277721" />](#) Gary Shaffer, chief executive officer of the Tulsa City-County Library. (Photo by Rip Stell)

executive officer of Tulsa's 24-branch [library](#) system.

Some libraries offer classes and research services you might expect at a trade school or college.

"They are becoming more and more part of a place not just to discover information, but a place to create new knowledge, new information," said Rick Luce, dean of [University of Oklahoma Libraries](#).

Many libraries serve as virtual offices, with free online access and reference materials, desks, power, and meeting space. Shaffer sees its knowledge base as the ideal entrepreneur's haven, providing every resource needed to understand and operate a business.

"Libraries get you past the pay wall," said Jane B. Malcolm, assistant director of Oral Roberts University [Library](#) Public Services. "They get you down in the deep Web, because we subscribe to databases of information that have already been vetted."

Many libraries provide regular concerts, lectures and social meetings.

"The library has a role for engaging our learners in a very active way with the culture, the intellectual life of the university and the community," said Sheila Johnson, Oklahoma State University's dean of [libraries](#).

TULSA – At first glance, downtown Tulsa's Librarium looks like a misnomer. Only a quarter of its 22,000 square feet shelters traditional bookshelves. Computer terminals, work tables and benches fill half of the Tulsa City-County Public Library facility.

Busy users man 33 of those 40 free-use terminals, far outnumbering the eight people sitting down reading a book. A casual study of those screens reveals far more uses than scrolling text. One man adjusted his earphones to watch a video. One child shuffled in her seat as she played an online game. Other users read or fill out forms.

Welcome to the library of the 21st century. Forget images of Marian the Librarian reverently tending silent rows of bound parchments. Today's depositories of knowledge recall the days of ancient Alexandria, when bustling libraries anchored culture and government.

"We're transitioning from being a book warehouse, which is the public's perception of where a library is, into the provision of lifelong learning," said Gary Shaffer, chief

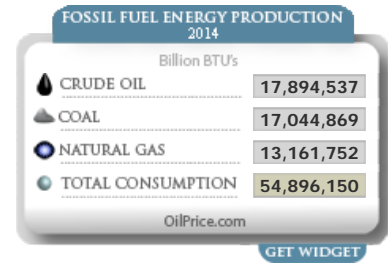
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The [Librarium](#) goes a step farther with a Make section for kids of all ages to build things with toys, sewing machines or other creative devices.

“Yes, it’s entertainment, but the entertainer is helping the kids learn,” said Lynda Reynolds, president of the [Oklahoma Library Association](#) and director of the Stillwater Public Library. “Such programs are definitely following up on ideas that we’re helping educate people with.”

Your local library even serves as the de facto customer service arm of many state and federal government departments and agencies, their officials directing users to go to the local library to learn procedures or file online forms.

“It’s a very exciting time for libraries that are engaged with their customers and shaping what we need now, as well as what we need of the future,” said Susan McVey, director of the [Oklahoma Department of Libraries](#).

All these services demonstrate adaptation to a digital age where consumers need never visit a library to download books, magazines, newspapers, music, games and movies. Many of those users may not realize their library probably provides those same services for free, both from online and brick-and-mortar branches.

“There has been some difficulty with libraries working with publishers who don’t want to give us access to e-books that we turn around and give out for free,” said Reynolds, who helped a growing consortium of small Oklahoma libraries provide e-book services to their users. “But a lot of the publishers are now coming up with models and they’re working with specific libraries, working out how best to market e-books.”

Such moves have spurred libraries to experiment with how they maintain and expand their collections, which have grown over the years to include not just books and magazines, but information and entertainment in a variety of other forms. With downloads increasing, many libraries are investing more of their limited dollars in electronic versions, which brings some welcome synergies.

“If you’re handling physical books, it takes a long time to process 20,000 books,” Malcolm said with a smile, recalling an email that delivered that many e-books to the ORU library with a single download. “So it’s pretty exciting what you can do.”

The widespread availability of electronic products also allowed many libraries to rethink how they use their limited physical space. By moving less-used resources to reserve shelves, more libraries are working to create more areas for conversation, meetings and performances.

“We often don’t have the luxury of providing all the space you want,” said [Oklahoma County Metropolitan Library System](#) Executive Director Donna Morris. “Most of our libraries, with a couple of exceptions, are really space-challenged.”

At the same time, with many older or backlist books still unavailable electronically due to copyright laws, the digital era heightens the importance of preserving aging inventories. Many libraries also expect to continue investing heavily in bound publications, noting that many readers across the different age groups still prefer them.

“We are not going exclusively to electronic acquisitions, to electronic materials,” said Johnson. “Not all things are better electronically for use.”

Today’s e-resources have spurred many libraries to maximize the unique value of their local collections, digitizing and sharing them as resources permit. While Johnson sees this as a time-honored charge of librarians to collect, maintain and preserve their region’s cultural history, it also provides the library a distinctive asset in a growing sea of digital information.

At the same time, it heightens pressure on both the library’s funding and knowledge base. While technology costs have decreased in many areas, the volume of records to be digitized, cataloged and maintained grows. These records often span numerous evolving software and hardware systems over the last century, many not just outdated, but tied to decaying paper, film or tape.

“You have to have some level of understanding some of the things consumers are trying to get to,” said McVey. “But one of the advantages of being a librarian is that it’s a learning organization and you’re encouraged to learn new things.”

That aligns with the central role librarians see for themselves: connecting and educating people on their desired information, in whatever form it’s in.

“It used to be the librarian was so valuable because there was limited information and finding it was the key,” said Shaffer. “Now there’s so much information out there, it’s like finding a needle in a haystack. How do you find it? So the skills of the librarian are highly needed.”



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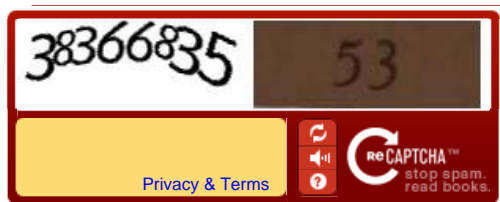
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