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### Area libraries continuing to thrive in digital age with family-focused resources, programming

By Art Haddaway News Editor 3 hrs ago



Mandy Wendel, left, brings her three children to the Owasso Library about once a week to peruse the bookshelves with her friend Charlotte, right, and her two children. ART HADDAWAY/Owasso Reporter

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Owasso is a community of booklovers, many of whom can be found at the city's library.

Locals of all ages, from parents and children to teachers and students, make their way to the Owasso Library every day to enjoy its wide range of resources and programming.

Mandy Wendel, for example, brings her three children to the facility, located at 103 W. Broadway St., about once a week to peruse the bookshelves with her friend Charlotte and her two children.

"Libraries are valuable to teach kids the importance of books and learning and gaining knowledge about life," Wendel said. "I let the little ones pick out like one or two, but mostly for my (daughter) so she has a variety of books to read."

Kathy Vermillion, a teacher with Epic Charter Schools, also visits the Owasso Library about twice a week, where she meets with local students to help them with their coursework.

"The older kids, we've got geometry books or math books ... the little ones, they can walk around, it's not a confined space," Vermillion said. "Being a public location ... you can use (it) for the resources ... it's becoming a lot more popular for us anyway."

Wendel and Vermillion are among the hundreds of patrons who continue to still use and rely on local public libraries, like Owasso's, in an ever-growing digital age of iPads and e-books.

Built in 1990, the Owasso Library brings in about 140,000 visitors a year to browse its collection of around 50,000 books, CDs, DVDs, audio books, videos and magazines. Likewise, the facility has the fifth highest circulation volume of all the Tulsa City-County Library branches, logging an average of nearly 23,000 circulations on a monthly basis.

Owasso Library Manager Jennifer McQuade said she's proud to see the steady flow of traffic come

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through the doors and believes her many program offerings are one of the biggest draws for locals.

"We can't do enough programming," McQuade said. "We serve a lot of young families, and there's a lot of young families in Owasso, so I think that has a lot to do with it. We definitely concentrate on earlier literacy."

The library's team of 12 hosts about a dozen events year-round for children, but also for teens and adults, including popular selections like Bouncin' Beethovens, PAWS for Reading and a comprehensive summer reading program.

McQuade said she feels another way the library has thrived in a technology-driven era is simply by adapting to those trends. Currently, the library offers Wi-Fi, 14 public-access computers, laptops for in-house use, an AWE early literacy computer and two self-checkout portals to assist patrons.

"I think it's just the variety that we've offered and the way that we've embraced the technology that's keeping us relevant," she said. "I also think it's more than that ... the librarian can help you find what you need in an age when there's a million choices, and I think we're almost like guides in the digital age."

Norbert Kunz, who visits the Owasso Library three to four times a month, said he enjoys writing his research papers at the downtown center for not only the social environment but more so the ability to work online.

"I like just to be around people when I come here," he said. "I also like the idea that I can access the internet whenever I want to, and knowing that I don't have to have an internet at home, it will save me money as well."

The Collinsville Library, located at 1223 W. Main St., has also seen a consistent flow of traffic, drawing just over 2,000 patrons through its doors on a monthly basis.

Locals of all ages come to take part in the facility's many program offerings and library sessions, as well as peruse its more than 23,600 books, CDs, DVDs, audio books, videos and magazines on hand.

To accommodate its emerging customer base, the Collinsville branch carried out a [major remodel](#) in August 2017, in which it expanded its shelf and lounge space. The facility's key change, however, came when it replaced its main desk with two digital "self-check" machines.

"We help people a lot with technology because it's changing all the time and we're the ones they go to," said Collinsville Library Manager Rhonda Weldon, who echoed McQuade's sentiments. "We're here to be that human presence to help you navigate all of this digital world."

Even more than an ever-adapting digital hub, McQuade said she feels the library system serves as a place of security and socialization for individuals of all walks of life.

"I think for older people, we're a safe place they can come and spend time around other people," McQuade said. "For young moms, we're a safe place where they can come and interact with other moms and have a place for their kids to play."

Weldon added, "We're here to support people's need for connection ... we support literacy, we support connecting people to other people and to other resources. A library, to me, is an information hub and a center for community."

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**Art Haddaway** | Editor Art Haddaway

Art is a seasoned reporter of over 15 years with an extended background in writing and editing for a variety of publications and organizations.



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