

Looking at our Libraries: Circulation down, but more folks downloading books via OverDrive

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Today is the first day of November and "n" is, of course, is the first letter of that month. N is also the first letter of the word numbers; you're going to get a lot of them in the paragraphs below.

The Collier County library system runs on the same fiscal year as the county itself, going from Oct. 1 through Sept. 30. For the one-year period beginning Oct. 2013, total circulation (combined physical and electronic) was down, year to year, but the electronic component, led by OverDrive, is up 25 percent. OverDrive is the engine on the library website, www.collierlibrary.com, that allows you to download audio and e-books. Total circulation was 2,551,029 with the vast majority of it (2,300,271) in physical items.

The headquarters branch on Orange Blossom Drive had the most physical material circulation, with 736,743, followed by the Naples branch (420,495), South Regional (264,729), Golden Gate (204,428), Marco Island (181,786), Vanderbilt Beach (163,134), Estates (139,298), East Naples (114,440), and Immokalee (79,321). The tiny branch in Everglades City was up by 13 percent to 18,731. The jails of Collier County account for the smallest circulation number, 15,373.

January is the busiest month (223,785), with March a very close second (223,433). I think we can thank our seasonal folks for that. Circulation is lowest in September (163,247).

In terms of actual annual traffic, the door count was 1,314,598. That's folks coming into the libraries to return/pick up material, attend a program, see a movie, use an on-site computer, access the Internet via Wi-Fi, etc. On that last point, there were 58,584 users of Wi-Fi from inside a library, or outside the door, ever after hours, or from the parking lot.

The website also gets a lot of action with more than half a million (577,260) unique visits. Mine were mostly to reserve or renew books.

And, now a few words from a sponsor. The Friends of the Library of Collier County was formed in 1957 to establish a free public library here. That small group of citizens brought a request before the Collier County commissioners, who approved it their September meeting.

There are nearly 3,000 FOL members now whose dues and donations enhance the basic programs, services, operations and materials provided by your county taxes. Well, 3,000 sounds like a big number but not when you consider the fact that the 2010 census shows Collier as home to more than 321,000 residents (Census.gov lists 339,642 as the 2013 population estimate.)

Lots of people say that they love the library, use the library, visit the library. More than 150,000 have cards. Yet only 3,000 spend 30 or more tax-deductible dollars to make the experience better, not just for themselves but for our community as a whole.

Become a Friend this month at Thanksgiving, because you are thankful for this great resource. Or, become a Friend next month at Christmas, because you are in a gift-giving mood. Or, if you are already a Friend, ask a friend to be a Friend.

One last request: Let's raise those circulation numbers.

Carla Grieve is the District Two representative on the county's Library Advisory Board.

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