

Role of Library should not be underestimated: CEO

(Re: Library needs to re-think its mission, says cardholder. October 27)

In the past year, the Aurora Public Library (APL) has hosted a few events in the Living Room that have enlivened our work space, attracted new faces to the Library and demonstrated our broad mandate to engage the community.

They have also caused disruption. In addition to the One Book/One Aurora wrap-up event on October 22, we have hosted a Theatre Aurora performance, Aurora Winter Blues Festival pop-ups, an Entrepreneurs-in-Residence series and numerous other expressions of community vitality.

As CEO, I attend as many of these events as I can, not just because I enjoy them, but to demonstrate that these events are important examples of APL's role as a cultural hub, and to reinforce that these kinds of activities are part of what will ensure APL's relevance and value to Aurora now and in the future.

Change can be difficult and no doubt some Library customers may wish we would retain our traditional approach to service, one that encourages quiet, solitary scholarship with a singular focus on providing reading material ? or at the very least, that we would confine these noisy activities to a separate, sound-proofed room.

The fact is we don't have an alternate space in which to hold these events, so they take centre stage for brief periods of time. In a typical month of 246 open hours, the Living Room becomes the focus for lively activity for approximately 4 to 8 hours. While the Library Board is working on facility improvements that will provide some sound abatement as well as additional space for community programming within the Library, we will continue to host events such as these in the Living Room that generate energy, provide entertainment and sometimes disturb the quiet of the Library.

Maintaining the quality of our extensive print collections is a priority for our staff and our stacks are full of popular and high quality content in a variety of formats. Books are alive and well at APL and the year over year increases in readership levels attest to that fact. But the Library's role in supporting inquiring minds goes beyond providing an abundance of reading materials. We are committed to exploring ways we can strengthen our community by attracting, inspiring and enabling the talent needed to foster innovation.

We have listened to those who use the Library, but also to those who don't see the public library as a meaningful part of their lives, and we are adapting our vision and mission to meet the needs of everyone who calls Aurora home.

We do this in part by opening up our space to artistic expression and joyful noise. To truly foster community spirit and engagement, the Library must be the place that residents can go to meet 'the other' ? the stay-at-home Mom and the young entrepreneur, the teenage musician and the retired construction worker, the twenty-something game enthusiast and the senior newcomer. The Library is the one place where people are welcome to gather that's free and open to all. That social cohesion role should not be underestimated.

Reading and literacy are at the heart of everything the Library does and this has not and will not change. By responding to the needs of our diverse clientele we are expanding into new and exciting shapes and we will continue to offer a space where people of all ages and interests can find something that speaks to their hearts.

Jill Foster, CEO
Aurora Public Library