

Library 'branches out' to Aurora's northeast with new presence at SARC



The Aurora Public Library is 'branching out' to Aurora's northeast with a new presence at the Stronach Aurora Community Centre.

The new micro-branch of the Aurora Public Library (APL) is the fulfilment of long-held plans to better serve residents of Aurora's northeast, which APL CEO Jodi Marr says has historically been an area where APL has 'less engagement' with residents.

The kiosk, which is located across from the customer service desk at the recreation centre, located on Wellington Street East, just west of Leslie Street, boasts nearly 200 books curated for all ages. All you need to use the micro-branch is a valid library card.

Once you've entered your card information, the kiosk 'dubbed the 'SARC Browse & Borrow' ' unlocks, and patrons can either check out or return books right there.

'This has been part of our strategic planning process for a while, but we've just been able to make it come together,' says Marr. 'At the end of last year, we confirmed the space and then this year we went ahead with the procurement of the machine and the processes ' we've been planning all this for approximately two years.'

After the construction of Aurora Town Square, Marr says this is the 'next step out into partnering with the Town of Aurora and finding common space where we can join together.'

'The SARC is an active community hub and it's also in an area of Town where we (APL) have had less engagement,' Marr continues. 'When we look at our Library members, we can see that people in the northeast part of Aurora are less serviced by the Library. This is a way to get them some of the things the Library does and this is a way to serve those community members, and now we can come and do more events.'

'Collections [of materials] is just a small part of what the Library does. This is a way to connect with people who are slightly further away, use the library less, and now they have the opportunity to use the Library more.'

The new kiosk and its systems represent an investment of approximately \$50,000.

Similar kiosks have seen great success elsewhere, including Barrie, which has multiple micro-branch locations throughout the city.

Aurora's new kiosk could be up and running as early as the end of this week ? with a ribbon cutting with Mayor Tom Mrakas, which members of the public are encouraged to attend, set for Thursday, July 24, at 3.30 p.m.

As members of the APL team inspected the kiosk in its new location on Monday afternoon, it already attracted the interest of SARC patrons.

Books now in place within the kiosk represent some of the most popular items that are checked out regularly at the APL's home branch at Yonge and Church Streets, but is a collection unto itself that was specifically secured for the micro-branch.

Each volume has an RFID tag and the kiosk machine runs a scan every time it closes to keep up-to-date on inventory, what book was taken out, and onto whose library card. When you return a book, you put it back in, and the process repeats.

?It's just as easy as scanning your card, opening the door, and placing it on the shelf ? the only rule is, if it's full, please don't jam it in!?' says Marr with a laugh.

The Library will continue to consult with residents as the kiosk is used and collect data on what's borrowed and what's returned in order to gauge what community members want in the future and they can adjust the collection accordingly.

?It's nice, it's bright, it holds about 196 items and is a mix of fiction, non-fiction, children's, youth, teen and picture books,?' says Marr. ?You can even take things out when you're here for a class [with one of your children], read it, and return it that same day. It will hopefully [also serve] people who are using the SARC and need something to do, and we'll see about putting some other fun stuff into it in the future.?

Looking ahead, Marr says she would love to see these types of kiosks expand beyond the SARC to other municipal hubs, such as the Aurora Seniors' Centre and other recreational facilities, and points to examples elsewhere that have similar set-ups at retirement homes and more.

?This is our first new collection within the community ? it's a huge investment, but it's worth it. This is one way for us to serve community members more fully, without building a bricks-and-mortar branch,?' says Marr, adding now that the micro-branch in place, she sees an opportunity to expand APL programming to the SARC down the road.

?Sometimes [we'll get comments on machines like these], ?Well, I guess we don't need librarians anymore. We've got this.' I want to definitely say that librarians are key for curation and selection of materials and this machine does not replace the work that our staff does. This is just a support so that we can expand within the community and get our staff to come out and do more and other engaging events.?

By Brock Weir