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*Annual observance is April 2-8, 2006*

**National Library Week is perfect time to recognize value of libraries**

Wisconsin libraries of all types—school, special, public, and academic—provide incredible value to residents, and National Library Week, April 2-8, is the perfect time to acknowledge the contributions libraries make. Library advocates know that strong Wisconsin libraries keep us all in a better state, and that libraries are essential, life-changing institutions.

Libraries are essential institutions in a democratic society because they play a non-partisan role in providing the information that allows citizens to make informed decisions. They are also essential to the educational process because they support curricula, teach information literacy, and foster critical-thinking skills. Libraries are essential partners in creating educated communities because they provide opportunities for self-education, life-long learning, and self-improvement.

Providing opportunity is central to the mission of libraries, and they accomplish this by leveling the playing field to make the world of information available to anyone seeking it. Unfortunately, not everyone understands or appreciates the value and importance of libraries, especially during tight fiscal times when there are difficult budget decisions to be made. But consider the following:

- Libraries save lives. A study published in the Bulletin of the Medical Library Association in April 1992 reported that physicians attributed information provided by the library to their ability to avoid patient mortality. The physicians also rated the information provided by the library more highly than that provided by other information sources such as diagnostic imaging, lab tests, and discussions with colleagues.
- Libraries in the United States circulate about the same number of items as FedEx ships each day—5.3 million.
- A 2006 Scholastic Research Foundation paper reviewed studies in 16 states that confirmed school libraries staffed by qualified library media specialists do make a measurable difference on student achievement.
- Libraries are busier during hard economic times. The Library Research Center at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign studied the 25 largest libraries in the United States. for a period of 60 months and found a correlation between economic downturns and increased library use.
- Five times more people visit U.S. public libraries each year than attend U.S. professional and college football, basketball, baseball, and hockey games combined. (1.1 billion vs. 204 million).

(MORE)

- In a 2003 Wisconsin study, one-third of those who do not use the library said that libraries deserve more state financial support. This study, conducted by Morrill Solutions for the Wisconsin Public Library Consortium, also showed that library users vote in higher percentages than non-library users.
- Developers of the Glendale Mall approached the Indianapolis Marion County Public Library officials with a lease proposal offering over 33,000 square feet of space for a branch library that would serve as an anchor store in the mall. The library has been very successful, helping to revitalize the mall.
- The City of Chicago uses public libraries as the anchors for neighborhood redevelopment. In their book "Better Together," Robert Putnam and Lewis Feldstein tell how the Daley administration has used libraries as catalysts for changing neighborhoods. In fact, Mayor Daley refers to the neighborhood library as the "heartbeat of the community."
- In 2005, Money Magazine ran an article titled "Disaster strikes. Now what? After the worst, eight ways to get back on your feet financially." Number seven on the list was "Get to the library." The magazine cited how libraries have forms people need, information people need, and free Internet access for sending messages. "Best of all, you have a bevy of free experts who can help you research whatever your issues are."

When you consider all that libraries have to offer, it's clear—Supporting Wisconsin libraries keeps us all in a better state!

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