

Best Small Library in America Award



Union County Carnegie Library
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Introduction: The Union County Carnegie Library, the first Carnegie Library in the state of South Carolina, is still housed in the original beaux arts structure constructed in 1905. The original Carnegie building contains the children's area which includes a separate teen center complete with three computers dedicated to teen users, reference materials, audio and video materials, magazines and books; an area for the smallest children complete with picture books, table and chairs; a space for older children housing audio, video and fiction books; a children's computing area with five computers dedicated to kids up to age 12, and a non-fiction collection with table space for kids to share. A small meeting room which is used by community groups representing diverse interests also occupies the historic section of the building. An addition built in the late 1980s houses a genealogy area complete with three computers dedicated to the study of family history, a microfilm station for access to our collection of local historic documents, a public access computing center with seven computers, periodicals, a reference department, books, audio and video materials for adult customers. A family computing area provides two computers and space for families to work and learn together. At approximately 8,000 total square feet, the Carnegie Library is fully utilized by the community day and night. Located in an historic district within the City of Union, the library is an architectural treasure and has come to represent the heart of this community.

During the past two years the library's profile within the community has transformed from a selective club warehousing an out-of-date collection with computers that occasionally functioned to an inclusive, modern, service-oriented community center. Membership, material circulation, patron visits, and use of computer resources and our website have all grown exponentially. Our patron population now represents the diverse ages, backgrounds, level of education and experience of our community. Located in the center of a large, predominantly rural county, the library provides the only high speed Internet access available to many residents. Public access computers in all areas of the library are utilized from the moment the doors open in the morning to closing.

Eligibility: Union County Carnegie Library is the sole public library serving Union County, South Carolina, with a total population of 28,306. The City of Union, the county seat in which the library is located, has a population of 8,973. Rural areas served by the library's Bookmobile include: Buffalo (1,426), Carlisle (496), Lockhart (39) and Jonesville (1,256).

Four strategies have been used to transform the library culture and its position within the community:

- 1. Staff focuses on excellence in service to all library users regardless of age, gender, race, ability or status.**
 - Creation of strong, simple mission and vision statements that provide a focus for all library activities and staff development.
 - Intransigent staff resistant to change replaced by willing learners with retail or service industry experience. Understanding that public service is their central mission, this "front" staff interacts with the public on the circ desk and floor, maintains shelves and public areas, provides roving reference services and assistance in genealogy. Teens are utilized as part-time front staff because they are vibrant, enthusiastic, willing learners and teachers. Staff receives an annual service assessment as part of their annual job review.
 - Staff is now required to attend at least 20 hours of continuing education annually which they can acquire through classes offered at the SC State Library, online through USC Columbia's School of Library and Information Science, in-house staff training days, or by reading articles that emphasize newer technologies designated by the director or technology specialist. All staff must receive Discus training (our database collection provided by the legislature through the State Library) annually.
 - Barriers to information have been removed by allowing all ages access to library cards. Previously children were required to be six years old to receive a library card. Five hundred bunny shaped library cards were purchased in 2006 to initiate an early literacy advocacy program that began at the city park's Easter Egg Hunt. Several hundred young children were registered immediately and in early 2008, one thousand additional bunny cards were purchased to continue the program.
 - In an economically disadvantaged county, fines and fees created barriers to library use for many families. Fines were removed for overdue materials in 2006. Fees for printing, copying and faxing have been reduced. All students receive five free copies daily. Information available only through a database or website is printed at no cost to the customer.
 - Operating hours have been changed to accommodate schedules of patrons. More evening hours and longer hours on Saturdays have increased library use for students and working adults. Sunday hours will be added as soon as budget and staff allows.
- 2. Programs and activities emphasizing the historic library building and the county's wealth of history including family genealogy.**
 - Created genealogy area with research collection, workspace for family historians, dedicated genealogy computers with databases available in library and remotely from website, printer, microfilm machine and collection, access to local history collection and reference area. Dedicated staff member who also provides reference services assists visitors with research questions, and answers calls and e-mails concerning genealogy. Works in concert with local history museum to provide accurate answers to local history queries.
 - Provide planned and impromptu tours of historic building to local civic groups, classes and visitors to build awareness of Carnegie Library's historic value to community. Provide copies of Union County Library History by Jennie Fant on website and in library with permission from author.
 - Two library staff are creating searchable database of Union County cemetery images and text for researchers of family and county history. Funded by LSTA grant, The Tombstone 2.0 project will be accessible through the library website, and will become a community project once initial LSTA phase is complete. This project highlights the wealth of history found in Union's cemeteries and emphasizes the need to preserve them. A private donor has funded additional salary for worker to gather data from two more cemeteries. In final phase, volunteers will be recruited to collect gravesite photographs and epitaphs for entry into the database product.

3. Use of technology to solve library communication and space issues, and to help county residents become participants in a technology-centered society.

- A free blogging tool has become the centerpiece of staff communication. This blog provides staff online access to their weekly schedule as well as their designated time on the Circulation desk, makes all information available to staff 24/7, notes changes in policy and procedure, provides space for archiving information vital to library function and requires staff to become competent users of current technology tools for the completion of their duties.
- Purchased low cost ILS (\$1,000.00) designed for schools and used by local school district to meet the needs of patrons with low literacy skills and limited education. Added patron access to catalog from website where patrons can place holds and create personal book lists.
- Reduced barriers to computer use by making the process as simple as checking out a book. Patrons check in at desk where a bar coded card is used to check them onto a PAC; they use barcode as password to log on to the system. Patrons have enthusiastically embraced this system and it has removed the need for staff to assist each user to log on. Use of Microsoft's free tool, Shared Computer Toolkit, has dramatically reduced support issues and has increased confidence in patrons who now know that they will not "damage" the computers by being novice users.
- Recently purchased off-lease systems from local university to increase our number of public access computers and to provide parts and upgrades for our aging systems. Our small annual budget does not allow for more than \$2,500.00 annually for technology. With our dramatic growth in patron computing, a budget shift will have to occur over the next years from books and print materials to e-books, downloadable audio/video and replacement computers.
- Increased services for rural patron through wireless broadband on the Bookmobile. With a low-cost wireless plan from Alltel, the bookmobile staff can search and circulate materials more easily with real-time access to our ILS. In addition, staff can download and print materials for patrons, and access and promote use of database resources provided by SC State Library. In the future, we hope to provide wireless access for patron laptops through the Bookmobile in these rural areas where other high-speed service is not available.
- Redesigned website and implemented reference e-mail from website to provide online services to patrons throughout the county.
- Purchased Playaways for adults, teens and children as an introduction to downloadable audio material in 2007. Created public interest with signs posted throughout the library stating "The Playaways Are Coming!" When the Playaways arrived on the shelves patrons were prepared to use them, and began to anticipate the addition of downloadable audio and video resources from our website. Playaways remain a heavily circulated item.
- Technology competencies are recommended, taught, supported and tested by staff Technology Specialist. Mastery of these skills creates a staff comfortable with newer technologies who are able to transfer their comfort and knowledge to the public.
- Technology Specialist is available daily to work with patrons and staff on computing issues. Computer classes are provided to the community on a variety of patron-centered topics; most patrons enrolling in these courses are senior citizens seeking to master basic technology skills.
- Provide technology training to Library Board members to make them strong public advocates of library resources and the uses of available technology.

4. Commitment to the growth and well-being of the community's children by providing quality literature, dedicated service and exceptional programs with an emphasis on children's increasing technological needs.

- Used existing shelving and space to create separate areas in original Carnegie building for teens, young children and middle readers. Worked with South Carolina State Archives to preserve historical status and comply with regulations restricting changes to building's interior. Result: children's area painted bright yellow rather than the previously existing gray.
- Art Cart available daily in children's area with crayons, markers, colored pencils and paper. Sign says "Please draw and color." Walls are used as gallery for children's creations.
- Wide variety of board games on shelf for in-library use. Children generate their own games, contests and tournaments.
- Healthy snacks are available after school in the meeting room for kids, many of whom come to the library right after school and don't leave until closing at 8:00 pm. Local grocery stores provide snack-makings like graham crackers, peanut butter, juice and fruit.
- Bookmobile with new kid-friendly graphic design visits every school to register kids for library cards annually. Bookmobile participates in school events and serves as the only library resource to local independent school one full day weekly. Bookmobile assistant provides storytelling to childcare facilities and day cares.
- In 2005, 300 students registered for Summer Reading at the library; this number represents those who lived near enough the main library to walk or those who had parents able to transport them, approximately 6% of the county population of schoolchildren grades K-12. In 2007, we partnered with Union County School District to make the library Summer Reading program an essential summer activity; 800 children registered (15% of students K-12) and took part in literacy events at the library throughout the summer including; family craft night, board game tournaments, Harry Potter book release party, storytelling events, kudzu basket making classes, poetry writing workshops and a rock concert on the library steps with The High Strung. In 2008, as a result of the partnership, over 4,000 children were registered for the program through the school system and child care facilities, nearly 75% of the k-12 student population. Each of these children left school for the summer with a Summer Reading packet containing a personalized reading log and instruction sheet, bookmobile schedule, lists of recommended books, book marks, and library event calendar. Result: each child in Union County, K-8, left school for summer registered, equipped and motivated to be a participant in the Summer Reading Program. High school students participated if interested.

Statistical Data:

	2005	2006	2007	2008
Population Served		12,818	13,247	17,100
Total Annual Budget*	285,082.	300,621.	309,763.	310,000.
Per Capita Budget	9.83	10.36	10.79	10.83
Circulation				
Adults--Books/AV		42,323	45,614	56,924
Adults-- Computers		7,298	9,635	19,876
Children--Books/AV		15,668	20,368	22,000
Children—Computers		725	5,309	10,054
Materials Budget	18,892	26,927	55,835	64,873
Physical Visits		51,108	113,705	126,051
Number of PACS per Population served	10	12	20	21
Number of Days/Hours Service per week	47	47	52	54
Number of Staff	5	6	7	9
Percentage of staff with professional degree	20	17	14	11

*Union Carnegie Library receives an annual rate of 4 mills from county taxes. One mill equals approximately \$50,000.00. The library pays all of its own utilities, building and grounds maintenance, insurance policies, interior repair and upkeep, furniture, shelving, bookmobile expenses and repairs, staff salaries and benefits. The only other annual source of income is State Aid to Public Libraries which varies according to legislative allocation.

Partnerships and Cooperative Relationships:

- Union County School District: Summer Reading Program, teen volunteers.
- Corporate Sponsors: Bi-Lo, Food Lion and Walmart: snack supplies for kids, art supplies and summer reading supplies.
- Wofford College, Spartanburg: provide award-winning musicians to library for programs: 40% increase in patron participation from 2007-2008.
- Family Resource Center: bring parents & pre-schoolers to library storytime for literacy events and teaching reading skills to families.
- Spartanburg County School District: participant in Teaching American History grant with Union County Historical Museum and Rosehill Historic Site to provide hands-on learning to Spartanburg and Union county history students.
- Union County Adult Education Department: creation of county literacy council.
- Rotary Club of Union: donate annually to Summer Reading Program.
- Union County Humane Society: site for annual fundraising dog show for Humane Society. Community Favorite!
- Union County First Steps: member of board, share storyteller who visits preschools throughout county.
- Juveniles Expecting Excellence Program (JEEP) through Department of Juvenile Justice: provide worksite and job training to students participating in program.
- Ladies of Iris: social organization for young women of color. Library volunteers.
- Leadership Union: library staff members; library provides program about facility and resources to Leadership participants.
- Union Carnegie Library is approximately 30 miles from the closest public library. At present, public library directors from across the state meet at the State Library in Columbia for rural directors meetings, APLA meetings and public library advocacy. We also cooperate in Bookmobile, Technology, and Children's Services Exchanges at the same site. Resources are shared between most libraries informally; few formal agreements exist.