

A Centennial Celebration

Library commemorates 100 years of offering lifelong learning opportunities

By Jeanie Senior

The Goldendale Community Library begins a year-long celebration of its centennial this month. The celebration marks 100 years since a group of determined women founded a free public library in their small town.

At its organizing session, the first motion passed by the Women's Association of Goldendale called for the formation of "a permanent organization for the uplift of Goldendale." What followed was 10 decades of the sort of uplift only a library can provide.

Statistics tell part of the story: In 2011, the library had more than 78,314 visits from people who checked out 85,360 items, including books and DVDs.

"For a town of 3,500 people and an effective service area of 8,000, that's pretty impressive," says Community Librarian Naomi Fisher, who has held the post for 15 years. She is one of just six Goldendale head librarians since 1920.

Initially, the library consisted of a room in the Grammar School and was open every Saturday from 1 p.m. to 6 p.m. It was staffed by two members of



The current library building, expanded in 1985, includes two wings, an amphitheater and an outdoor deck.

the Women's Association who, early on, began to offer children's story time. The association arranged with the Washington State Library to have crates of books delivered to the county. Mobile book shelves were set up at ranch houses, making books accessible to the ranchers and their neighbors.

In the meantime, members of the association "were working constantly behind the scenes," Naomi says, to build a permanent library. They paid \$800 for two city lots and hired an architect, A.E. Doyle of Portland, who also designed Multnomah County Library.

The association obtained a grand prize: an \$8,000 construction grant from Andrew Carnegie's foundation. A

total of 44 Carnegie libraries were built in Washington state from 1901 to 1916, funded by grants totaling just more than \$1 million. Today, 33 of the buildings still stand; Goldendale's is one of 14 still in use as a library.

The designers of Carnegie libraries, Naomi says, "were really deliberate in thoughtfulness about the design."

Steps leading to the front door were thought to symbolize a rise to enlightenment. Lamps or lamp posts beside the front door sent the same message. The buildings had high ceilings for cooling and air circulation and tall windows for light.

Construction was completed in 1914. When the Goldendale Free Public Library held its grand opening in 1915, the shelves contained 1,440 books, most of them donated.

"An article in the Goldendale Sentinel



Brothers Elishama, left, and Zephaniah Johnson use one of the computers in the children's section of the library.

mentions in the month before the opening a call for donations from the community, for books that people no longer wanted in their personal library," Naomi says.

"At that time, the city of Goldendale pledged \$1,000 a year toward the upkeep of the library, which went to buy books."

The first book purchased was "The Mill on the Floss" by George Eliot.

The Goldendale Library became part of the Fort Vancouver Regional Library system in 1972.

"We're so privileged to be part of a large system that gives us the benefits of a large urban library," says Naomi.

She has heard newcomers express surprise at finding "world-class library service in a small town like Goldendale, particularly in a county that has struggled financially."

A \$1.2-million renovation in 1985 expanded the library's size from about 2,000 square feet to 15,660 square feet, adding new wings at each end of the original building, a mezzanine, a community meeting room, an elevator, an outdoor amphitheater, and a second-floor deck.

"The changes I've seen since I became head librarian are in technology," says Naomi. When she arrived in 1996, "we only had had the computerized catalog for a short time."

Now the library has computers with free public access to the Internet, there are computers in the children's section, and the building has Wi-Fi throughout.

The library also has several small notebook computers that patrons can check out for two-hour periods and use in the building.

Technology has also affected patrons' interests. Naomi says DVDs now are the most popular collection at the library.

"The numbers are not as high as fiction novels or even nonfiction books but as far as raw per-capita circulation per item, they are far and away the highest."

Naomi says people are changing how they use the library, and the library is responding.

Goldendale's library operates the bookmobile that serves the east end of Klickitat County and makes regular circuits to outlying communities.

In the library, volunteers teach adult literacy classes. A weekly Toddler Time session, for children from birth to age three and their mothers, attracts 25 to 30 participants.

When numbers at story time for preschoolers dropped because more children are in all-day kindergarten or pre-school, the library started to take story time to Head Start and day care.

"Now we do more story times off-site than we do in the branch," Naomi says.

Naomi, who grew up in Yakima and attended Whitman College, came back to Washington state after working at an academic library in Indiana, where she also earned her advanced degree in library science.

She says she loves her job, the community where she works, and the library.

"I can't think of a more gratifying profession than to be offering lifelong learning opportunities to the public through a public library, where there are no barriers," she says. "You don't have to be rich to access the resources. And to recognize my role in the long history of the Goldendale Library is very special." ■

Year-long Centennial Events Planned

The centennial celebration continues through June 2013. Following is a list of already-scheduled events.

- ▶ **Sunday, June 24: Centennial kickoff celebration and fundraiser at the Glass Onion restaurant in Goldendale**
- ▶ **Friday, July 6 and Saturday, July 7: Community Days Book Sale at the library**
- ▶ **Thursday, August 16: Ice Cream Social**
- ▶ **Thursday, September 13: "The Stories Old Buildings Tell Us," a lecture on historic architecture by Michael Herschensohn**
- ▶ **Saturday, November 3: Meet the Authors—Reception and book signing featuring authors from the Gorge area**

Beginning this month, special displays highlighting the library's history are installed in the front display case. Among the items displayed: the original handwritten record of books purchased for the library, and notes from the Women's Association organizing meeting.



The Goldendale Free Public Library began with 1,440 books. Today, DVDs are a popular library collection.