Prince George County Libraries

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– Colleen Formby, Librarian, Hyattsville Branch

About Prince George County

Prince George County in Maryland – located just outside the District of Columbia – has a population of about 870,000, and census figures list it as one of the wealthiest African American-majority counties in the United States. The county's 19-branch public library system is dedicated to providing the county's residents with both public spaces and the resources to support early literacy, after-school enrichment, and workforce development. The county is committed to keeping its libraries up-to-date and technologically current, and each year some of the branches are renovated.

One of St. George's busiest library branches is in Hyattsville, Md., just outside Washington D.C., on the Metro's Green Line. The branch attracts a large number of government workers, as well as students from nearby University of Maryland, American University, and Prince George's Community College. In recent years, a growing number of residents have used the library's resources to search for and apply for jobs. In addition, historians and genealogists come to the Hyattsville Branch to visit the Maryland Room, a special collection of over 8,000 books, pamphlets, clippings, maps, microfilm, magazines, and newspapers dedicated to the history and current events of the county and the state.

Scannx Book ScanCenter: A Special Collections Asset

Prince George County Libraries installed its first Scannx Book ScanCenter in the Maryland Room. The collection is heavily used, but non-circulating, and located in a restricted-access room. Originally, says Maryland Room Librarian Colleen Formby, the purpose of the Book ScanCenter was to facilitate access to the often-delicate materials in the collection, and it proved to be a perfect match for the materials and those who use them. Formby, who is also head of the library's Special Collections Committee, particularly likes the patented book-edge scanner design of the Book ScanCenter.

"The book edge holds the book nicely," says Formby. "It's a nice way to put the book on there without having to totally flatten it, which is not good for books. Ten percent of our materials are from 1890 and earlier, with the earliest from 1790. Even as late as the 1920s, that is not an age of good paper, and you don't want cracked spines."

In fact, Formby is so pleased with the scanner that she plans to recommend getting one for each of the county's special collections: The Selima Room at the Bowie Branch, which features materials pertaining to thoroughbred breeding and racing; The Sojourner Truth Room at the Oxon Hill Branch, with over 15,000 books on African American history and culture; and the Tugwell Room at the branch in Greenbelt, which details the unique history of that town, completely planned and built in the 1930s as part of President Roosevelt's New Deal.

"It's such a good amenity to have," she says. "If nothing else, I really think they should have one in the Sojourner Truth Room. That focuses on black studies and we're a predominantly African-American community, so it gets a fair amount of use."

Formby is also thinking about new uses for the Book ScanCenter to improve access to special library materials. "One of the things I've talked about was that this was a way to scan some of the archival photos I had and upload them to the

Maryland Room portion of the website so they would be accessible to people doing research from home," she says.

Beyond Special Collections

So far, the scanner is getting used most by those working in the Maryland Room, but the library does make it available to all patrons. And more and more of them are asking to scan things.

"It's closed up in the Maryland Room, and it was placed there for that purpose, but its secondary purpose is for anyone who comes in and needs to scan something," says Formby. "People ask several times a week, and we just take them right in and help them with it."

The response has been overwhelmingly positive, both from visitors who use the scanner and from the staff.

"This scanner is a dream," says Formby. "It is so easy to use. People today are so used to their smart phones that they've gotten used to touchscreens, so they get it immediately."

Some staff members – including Formby – say they are starting to use the Book ScanCenter for tasks they once performed on a more conveniently located All-In-One. "We have people that answer all the e-mail reference questions for the county – everything from putting a book on reserve to finding an obituary," says Formby. "I usually use the scanner here at my desk, but I have found myself just using the Scannx. It's so handy and it does such a good job."

Tapping into Full Potential of the Book ScanCenter

Concerned about managing the amount of time patrons spent using the Book ScanCenter, the library decided to set it up to only scan to USB drives. Scans are free, and there are drives available for people to use within the library. But other

features to allow users to send scans to e-mail, fax, print, or mobile devices are currently disabled. As the staff becomes more familiar with the Scannx solution, and to meet the cutting-edge demands of the next generation of library patrons, that may change.

"Younger people are growing up with all this technology, so they expect it to be there," she says. "I certainly never had to do a PowerPoint when I was in sixth grade. We are a public library, and the scanner is a public service."

Despite her resource-management concerns, Formby sees the Scannx Book ScanCenter as a real asset to the Prince George County Library system, and would recommend it to public libraries everywhere. "The biggest thing that keeps coming up is how easy it is to use, and how it does beautiful crisp scans," she says. "If it were up to me, I'd put one in every branch."