

Four Ways Libraries Strengthen and Sustain a Healthy Community

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We all know the local library as a place to borrow books, find peace and quiet, and explore helpful resources, but we often overlook its crucial role as part of the social fabric, health, and progress of the community it serves.

A Great Equalizer

Sounds lofty, right? But think about it: Everyone is welcome at the library regardless of age, income, gender, race, ethnicity, political affiliation, interests, or beliefs. You don't need a membership to come inside, and you don't need to buy something to stay. No other public space provides this kind of equal opportunity for individual and collective learning, connection, and growth. In a community like ours,

with—according to census data—a growing socioeconomic divide, a new, fully accessible library is equally welcoming to all.

An Important “Third Place”

While technology has connected us in ways we never thought possible, it has also helped make us more isolated than ever. In early 2023, Surgeon General Dr. Vivek Murthy deemed loneliness a public health crisis, and he proposed a national strategy to promote social connection, stating, “Connections are not just influenced by individual interactions, but by the physical elements of a community (parks, libraries, playgrounds) and the programs and policies in place. To strengthen social infrastructure, communities must design environments that promote connection, establish, and scale community connection programs, and invest in institutions that bring people together.”

Libraries serve as a community living room, or a “third place,” separate from home and work, where we seek knowledge, neutral ground, conversation, and connection. In an increasingly polarized world, libraries are more important than ever.

A Library of Things

A library card isn’t just for borrowing books! Some libraries lend out unusual items like small kitchen appliances, garden tools, toys, craft supplies, musical instruments, and fishing gear, reducing waste and saving community members money and time. At Skaneateles Library, you’ll find a collection of fun educational kits focused on topics like early literacy, exploring the world, and astronomy. You can also borrow a Wifi hotspot and free passes to many New York museums and parks. Stop by and see what other interesting “things” you can sign out.

A Remote Working Refuge

Let’s be honest, the ability to work from home has opened up a world of possibilities and flexibility—but it sure can be isolating and monotonous. A 21st-century library is equipped with all the technology and spaces you need to switch up your routine and confidently work outside your house. Job searchers can use the library to work on applications and get a leg up with online training, while students can find private spaces for tutoring sessions.

So, is our current Skaneateles Library fully able to serve as that much-needed “third place” in our community? Not yet, but it’s well underway: The new building on Fennell Street is being designed to accommodate and anticipate the needs of workers, students, and lifelong learners of all ages for the next 100 years.

Learn more about plans for the new Skaneateles Library at skanlibrary.org/newbuilding/.