



Zoe Quinton listens intently as her mom, Cayla Quinton, reads a book to her at the Aberdeen Timberland Library.



Are you due for a visit to a Grays Harbor library? The prose outweigh the cons!

STORY BY GAIL GREENWOOD AYRES
PHOTOS BY RICK MOYER

A mother and several children chatter as they carefully create crafts in the teen section of the W. H. Abel Memorial Library in Montesano. At the Aberdeen Timberland Library, a middle-aged man watches a Spanish action movie on a computer while, not far away, a young woman studies for a college exam. Meanwhile, at the Hoquiam Timberland Library, a young girl prudently picks the perfect book and settles onto the cushions of the colorful “Reading Fort.”

Similar vignettes unfold quietly – and not so quietly -- in nooks and crannies of eight Timberland Regional Library branches situated throughout Grays Harbor County. Such a staple of the Harbor’s cities for so many years, these institutions are sometimes overlooked for the great resources and sense of community they offer.

“The library is a meeting place, a place of learning and a place to connect with other community members. It is a cornerstone of the community,” said Susan Leite, the library manager at Amanda Park.

“Libraries are more than books,” agreed



Karen Kienenberger, the manager of the McCleary branch. “They are more people centered and activity centered. And, people who haven’t been for a while are certainly not going to find it as quiet as libraries once were.”

Below: Second floor view of the Aberdeen library.



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– Susan Leite

In fact, if you haven’t been to a library for a while, you might be surprised at what you will and won’t find. At the Timberland Regional Libraries, not only are the card catalogs and “shushing” librarians a thing of the past, so now are late fees!

Yep, beginning in January 2020, the library system decided to forgo issuing

Left: Hoquiam Timberland Library. Below: A mural by artist Erik Sandgren is displayed at the Montesano library.



Patience Young enjoys a book at the Hoquiam library. Above: A stained glass window adorns the Elma library. Right: Sarah Livingston, manager of the Hoquiam library.



Caelin Quinton is engrossed in a book at the Aberdeen library.

fines for books returned after their due dates, now only charging people if they actually lose or damage a book.

What you will find, library employees agreed, is free scanning and faxing, free use of computers, as well as up to \$44 a month of free printing for library card holders! Free wifi is not only available in the libraries, it is also available before and after library hours – from 6 a.m. to midnight – to also allow people to use it from nearby parking lots. Online content includes the Kanopy streaming services and thousands of e-books and e-audio books, newspapers, magazines and much, much more.

“The digital divide is very real, especially in communities like ours,” said Sarah Livingston, the manager of the Hoquiam Timberland Library. “Not everyone has a cell phone or a computer or good wifi connections, so people come to use what we have available.”

Not everyone even has a suitable quiet place to attend a Zoom meeting, have an online doctor’s appointment, take a college test or talk to a lawyer. With good wifi, and the use of a computer and quiet space, libraries can help bridge that divide, Livingston said.

You will also discover the checkout process is faster due to radio-frequency identification tags that library workers painstakingly attached to every item when the libraries were closed to the public at the beginning of the Covid-19 epidemic. Now when checking out, a patron doesn’t even need to scan the bar codes, the machine instantaneously

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Shari Brophy, Elma library assistant.

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reads the information for each item in a stack.

In addition, you will find librarians and other employees eager to help answer questions and locate what you are looking for, as well as a place that is welcoming to everyone, even for those who just need to use a public restroom, sit and rest, or get out of the heat, rain or cold.

"A lot of people have misconceptions about libraries and who they are for. They are for everybody," Hoquiam's Livingston said.

The eight Timberland Regional Library branches in Grays Harbor – in Aberdeen,

Hoquiam, Montesano, Elma, McCleary, Oakville, Amanda Park and Westport – are just a portion of a five-county library system that also includes Pacific, Mason, Lewis and Thurston counties in Southwest Washington, spanning 7,000 square miles. (Ocean Shores also has a library, but it is not part of the TRL system.)

"Everybody is surprised whenever they find out what's going on at the library."

– Chris Springer

But it's not just access to all those 29 branches of the Timberland Regional Library System, that a patron has access to! The TRL system also has reciprocal borrowing agreements with 13 other library systems in Washington including the King County Library System, the Seattle Public Library and the North Central Regional Library. That means you have a good shot to find that best-seller, obscure biography, unusual magazine, local history book or popular children's movie!



The 'Reading Fort' in the Hoquiam library is a comfortable and fun place to dig into a book.

In addition to accessing the breadth and depth of all the books in all those libraries, patrons also have access to various collections of things housed at different branches.

For instance, two pairs of binoculars, birding books and maps are included in the Birding backpacks that can be

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Corby Varness and her dog, Luna, listen while children practice their reading at the Montesano library.

checked out for three weeks, just like a book. Similar items include "Check out Washington," "Explore your Forest!" and the "Environmental Education" backpacks.

Outside of Grays Harbor, musical instruments, including a keyboard, guitar, violin, bongo and ukulele and more, can be checked out of the Tumwater Timberland Library, while fishing rods and tackle boxes, along with a Washington Discover Pass, are available nearby at the Lacey and Tumwater branches.

Within Grays Harbor, go to the Aberdeen library to check out large framed prints or paintings to hang on your wall for three weeks. In Hoquiam, the library houses a collection of assistive devices to help with mobility, communication, vision or hearing issues. These include technology aids, such as specialized computer keyboards, hearing devices or glasses that help people with light sensitivity. The idea is that patrons can take the items home to see if they are helpful



A patron reads in the Montesano library.

before deciding to make the investment themselves, manager Livingston explained.

And in Montesano, library manager Chris Springer is beginning to gather kitchen

tools for people to check out in a community that he has discovered includes many cooks and bakers. (He can tell by the popularity of the cookbook section!)

Another treasure that Springer has at his branch is a 3-D printer available to use for free to patrons.

"We've had people make everything from a fly wheel for a fishing rod and needed parts to fix something to a lot of different toys," Springer said. Patrons just go online to get the digital blueprint created using computer-aided design software and then bring it into the library.

Springer also hosts the Montesano Canine Reading Buddies, who come, with their owners, to listen when children practice their skills by reading aloud to them.

"Everybody is surprised whenever they find out what's going on at the library," said Springer. "Every community is a little different. The managers are given

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The library branches addresses and hours:

Aberdeen Timberland Library

121 E. Market St., (360) 533-2360

9 a.m. to 6 p.m. Mon. – Sat.

Closed Sunday.

Amanda Park Timberland Library

6118 U.S. Hwy. 101, (360) 288-2725

10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Tues., Weds.

Thurs. and Sat.

Closed Monday, Friday and Sunday

Elma Timberland Library

119 North 1st St., (360) 482-3737

10 a.m. to 6 p.m. Tues. and Weds.;

9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Thurs- Sat.

Closed Sunday and Monday.

Hoquiam Timberland Library

420 7th St., (360) 532-1710

9 a.m. to 6 p.m. Tues. – Sat.

Closed on Sunday and Monday.

McCleary Timberland Library

121 South 4th St., (360) 495-3368

10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Tues. and Weds.,

11 a.m. to 7 p.m. Thurs.;

and 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Sat.

Closed Monday, Friday and Sunday.

Montesano Timberland Library

125 Main St. S., (360) 249-4211

9 a.m. to 6 p.m. Tues., Weds., Thurs.;

10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Fri. and Sat.

Closed Sunday and Monday.

Oakville Timberland Library

204 Main St., (360) 273-5305

11 a.m. to 6 p.m. Tues.,

10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Weds., Fri. and Sat.

Closed Sunday, Monday and Thursday

Westport Timberland Library

101 E. Harms Drive, (360) 268-0521

9 a.m. to 4 p.m. Tues. – Sat.

Closed Sunday and Monday

While not a part of the Timberland Regional Library System, the Ocean Shores Library, also offers great resources and serves as a community hub. Established in 1972, the library moved into its current 4,200-square-foot building in 1993.

Ocean Shores Library

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Libraries *(continued)*

some latitude to develop the collections and programs to fit the needs of their community. It also makes it a lot of fun," he said.

In Westport, library manager Jennifer Finlayson becomes particularly animated when talking about the Veterans Connection Café, a program that reaches out to the many veterans in the Westport area. Through several partnerships, Gwyn Tarrence, the head of the American Legion in Aberdeen, meets with veterans and their family members on the second and fourth Tuesdays of the month.

"She helps them access services, whether they are applying for VA benefits or local things, like at Coastal Community Action Program," Finlayson said. "We have a ton of vets out here and I saw this as a way of improving lives in our local community."

Meanwhile, the McCleary branch successfully piloted a program called "Expanded Access Hours" and is still offering it. Patrons over 18 years old who register and agree to abide by the rules are given a special card or key fob to access the library during unstaffed hours or days from 7 a.m. to 8 p.m. During these hours, they can make copies, use computers, peruse the bookshelves, check out books, work quietly or just sit and read. A parent who has registered can even take their children into the library when it's closed to the public to let them play with the library's toys or read books.

"Families come in sometimes to use the Lego table or play with a gaming station," Finlayson said. "Homeschoolers also like to come in and use it, and several nonprofit organizations come in and use that time to make copies. And, then there are just people who work during our open days and college students who want a place to study quietly."

Each of the Grays Harbor Timberland Regional Libraries is closed on Sunday, and all but the Aberdeen branch are also closed on Mondays. The hours and other days off vary from branch to branch.

The size, shape and feel of each building is unique as well. The stately Aberdeen

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The Amanda Park Timberland Library's design was inspired by the style of a Native American longhouse.

Photo by Susan Leite





Katt Church peruses books at the Hoquiam library.

Libraries (continued)

branch, which is due for a refresh, remodel and expansion, is the biggest of the eight at 17,051 square feet, and the Oakville branch is the smallest branch at 1,045 square feet. Managed by Lizz Borbas, it is housed in a former

church building, along with the Oakville City offices.

The Amanda Park library's design, inspired by the Quinault Indian culture and modeled after a Native American longhouse, has garnered awards for its architecture and is worth a visit to see, even if you don't need a book.

Arguably the Hoquiam library is the crown jewel of those in Grays Harbor.

Built as a Carnegie library in 1911, it was designed in the Prairie style, which is unusual for the Pacific Northwest. The dark wood shelving, trim and stairway banisters, the original oak tables and chairs and the extra-large grandfather's clock that loudly chimes, give it regality and presence. While cozy, its design and many windows make it also open and airy. The grand building was placed on the National Register of Historic Places in

1983, and then was tripled in size in a major remodel ending in 1990. Such care was taken to match the style and symmetry that it takes someone in the know to point out which part was the original building.

Murals, stained glass, statues and paintings by local artists, including Elton Bennett, Erik Sandgren, Jenny

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Each Timberland library has computers for use, as seen in the Hoquiam library.

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Fisher and others, adorn various library branches throughout Grays Harbor. And, several of the libraries make a point to showcase local artists in temporary exhibits as well.

Each of the Grays Harbor Timberland libraries has something unique to offer with the personality of the community and the library managers and staff displayed at each branch.

"In Elma, I think the library is the hub of the community," said manager Dee Depoe, who has been a librarian for 43 years, the

last five in Elma. She is eager to start up in-person programming in September after a long Covid-induced hiatus.

Excitement for the return of in-person programming is a common sentiment among the librarians. Story hours will likely be the first to resume, followed by other parts of the TRL System's rich and varied programming, such as authors' talks, storytellers, kids' shows, live musical groups and book reviews.

The Timberland Regional Library has an extensive, up-to-date, interactive website at trl.org. To find out about a specific branch or program, go to www.trl.org and click "Locations." 



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How to get a library card

Getting a library card for the Timberland Regional Library is free, fast and easy.

First, those eligible to apply for library cards must either live in, own property in, go to school or work in Timberland's five-county service area, which includes Grays Harbor, Pacific, Mason, Lewis and Thurston counties. (Within this five-county area, some cities have not contracted or annexed for library services so they must pay a non-resident fee for a regular card. In Grays Harbor County, the only area that is not part of the TRL system is Ocean Shores.)

Second, you can either go into a library branch to apply or print out an application online. Take in the filled-out application along with a piece of ID, such as a driver's license. If the form of ID doesn't include your address, simply bring a piece of mail, a checkbook, a rental agreement or similar document showing your address. Children under 18 years old can receive a card with a parent's or guardian's verification of identity and address.

Or, you can walk into any branch library with some identification and ask a librarian to help you sign up for a card. They'd love to help. Besides, September is National Library Card Sign-up month! For more information, visit www.trl.org.