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Timberland Libraries Provide Vital Community Services, Even After Hours

Growing up intermittently homeschooled and visiting libraries as part of her education, Sonja Rosas dreamed of being let loose alone in the library at night. Now, thanks to Timberland Regional Library's Expanded Access Hours, that dream is coming true.

"It's been a fantasy of mine since childhood, just to be able to show up and have all the books to myself is fantastic," said Rosas, a 29-year-old Packwood resident.

Timberland Regional Library (TRL), which boasts 29 locations across five counties, began to offer Expanded Access Hours (EAH) in March 2019 at the McCleary location, expanding to Packwood in June 2022. With an EAH key card or fob, patrons can access the library from 7AM to 8PM, outside normally staffed operating hours, up to 365 days a year.

But it's not all dreamy-eyed bibliophiles wandering the stacks at night. Packwood has 30 patrons signed up for EAH, allowing them access to computers, wifi, printers, restrooms and many other library resources. For residents of rural areas, this is game changing.

"Having access to the other services is huge, printing and wifi access are huge out here where we don't have good wifi," said Rosas. "We don't have wifi at home. Even if I could do it on a smartphone, oftentimes I'll go to the library just so I can benefit from the keyboard and big screen."

Rosas decided to carry a flip phone to be conscientious of what media she consumes, a choice she wouldn't have been able to make without EAH at her library.



See page 5..... Sonja Rosas is pictured at the Packwood Timberland Regional Library.

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From page 4

“I have problems with compulsive behavior,” Rosas joked. “Making that choice to set healthy limits would not have been possible without having access to the internet at the library ten minutes away.”

Packwood and Mountain View Library Manager Judi Brummett says that, while they log roughly 100 books checked out outside of staffed hours monthly, there’s no way to gauge the impact the availability of other technologies has on the community except for the printer paper running out faster.

“I use them for work a lot. I rely on having this technology available at the library,” said Rosas, who works at the Cispus Learning Center, among many roles she fills in the Packwood community. “Just last week I had to print out a form, fill it out, scan it and return it: I would not have been able to do that without extended access hours at the library.”

This program has drastically shifted the availability of crucial library resources in locations that aren’t open expansive hours.

“With small libraries, most of us are only open four days a week,” said Brummett. “We’re open 91 hours now, and we’re only staffed for 29 of those hours.”

TRL has the EAH program active at Hoodspport, McCleary, Naselle, Ocean Park and Packwood locations. Plans are in progress to expand the program to Amanda Park, Salkum, Ilwaco, Tenino and Westport locations in 2023.

For more information on EAH at Timberland libraries, visit TRL.org.

