

# Getting your hands on the right information

Mitchell, Elizabeth



Photo by Crombie McNeill

Elizabeth Mitchell

By Jennifer Bell *Intell*

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A newspaper advertisement brought Elizabeth Mitchell to the Friendly City for a job 27 years ago and the head of Belleville Public Library's information services has been here ever since.

Mitchell had just graduated from the University of Toronto with a Masters in Library Science and was looking for work when she spotted a Globe and Mail ad for the library position.

"I had never been to Belleville before, but had worked in Kingston and liked the area, so I decided to give it a try," she recalled.

Mitchell remembers thinking the job might last five or six years "at the most, then I would move on to something else.

"I guess the fact that I've been here 27 years means I like my job," she quipped.

Mitchell, who has a Bachelor of Arts in English, had a brief stint as a school librarian at the Widdifield Secondary School in North Bay before realizing she was more interested in library work than school teaching and returned to university in 1971.

Helping Belleville library patrons find what they're looking for is her job description, and although that hasn't changed over the years, the information sources certainly have.

"Instead of looking up something in a book, I quite often use the computer instead, to search the Internet or one of the many databases we have on disk or CD-rom."

The 54-year-old Mitchell, who was born in Cochrane and grew up in the Bracebridge area, said people who take one of the library's information services' tours "are surprised by the wealth of information we have here.

"For a library our size, we have very good resources. The ability to computerize things like encyclopedias and other databases means that we can keep more information in a room that hasn't changed physically in size."

For example, she has catalogued all births, marriages and deaths in The Intelligencer between 1900 and 1974, some of the 1980s, and is working on keeping the database current and filling in the existing gaps.

"We get all kinds of requests for that kind of information from genealogists, especially in the summer months, when they have the time to travel and do research."

Not all requests come in person, however, said Mitchell.

"We're getting a percentage of questions by e-mail, through the library website ([www.bellevillelibrary.com](http://www.bellevillelibrary.com))."

And the Internet terminals now available

in the information department are almost always in use, she commented.

"It's a huge information source, and people use it for everything from genealogy to e-mail."

Assisting Mitchell in information services are two full-time and two part-time employ-

ees, all of whom have Bachelors of Arts in library-related fields.

"The qualifications for information services are more stringent now than they were when I started," she said. "There is so much research involved now that people with university degrees are required."

Mitchell enjoys looking up the many requests received at information services — even those that present a challenge.

"It's a bit like solving a puzzle. You want to get as many pieces as you can."

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