

Halton Hills' love of libraries hit new highs

A skyrocketing increase in library use last year was "kind of mind-blowing" according to Library Board vice-chair Frank Loreto who recently presented the year-end stats at the Georgetown and Acton branches to Halton Hills councillors.

With satisfaction high and activities on the rise, it was "another banner year" according to Library Board Chair Jay Jackson in the wrap-up report, delivered by Loreto, who said patrons borrowed 75,000 more items of print material last year, downloaded 10,000 more eBooks and asked 16,500 more questions of library staff.

As remarkable, Loreto read, was the increase in programming at both branches, including the record-breaking 15,159 children - up 13 per cent over last year - attending 667 programs to foster a love of rewarding, and twice as many adults

programs, often in partnership with non-profit agencies, including the Adult Learning Centre and Halton, Small Business Centre.

A new Astronomy program at the Acton branch was spearheaded by Acton's former councillor Norm Elliott and the North Halton Astronomy Club. Loreto said 84 people attended two stargazing sessions, and the program will run again this year.

Mayor Rick Bonnette was "surprised" by the circulation numbers and asked Loreto if, in his "wildest dreams," he expected such success, noting there were concerns that eBooks could hurt library use. "Now we have eBooks. I think it's a credit to the staff, the Boardand we have two such wonderful libraries," Bonnette said, pointing out the Georgetown branch was getting 700 visitors a day.

Library Board member, Georgetown Councillor Moya Johnson - described as a "tremendous advocate" by Bonnette - said the numbers prove "libraries are not what they used to be."

"It's not a place to get a book and then go three weeks later and take it back," Johnson said, adding the new programming spaces allow staff to "really shine," but there is one problem - "It's just finding the time to read the books that's hard," Johnson said.

Georgetown Councillor Ann Lawlor said part of the increased use is due to decisions of past councils who made investments in the library system. "Not only is it a very exciting place and fun place to be, but it's a very beautiful place to be, and this is one of the major reasons, in both Acton and Georgetown, why the attendance has skyrocketed," Lawlor said.

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