

## Public Librarian Mary Anne Wilson



of the major resources available in schools. We studied the staffing patterns, types of programs offered to students, loan and fine structures, usage patterns, hours of operation, and funding. We looked at curriculum guidelines, school handouts, web pages and signage. We attended staff meetings and sat in on class visits, and listened to everyone who would talk with us.

We were a little staggered to learn that school library funding is very ad hoc – from nothing at one school [new team uniforms came first], up to \$25,000 per year, but we were very pleased to note that as a library system, we owned all of the major reference sources that were in the school libraries plus a great many that the schools did not own. Still, when planning the collection for Erin Meadows, although our role was first as a public library and secondly as a school library, we were very aware that the students represented a very large portion of our clientele and so we selected more curriculum-related materials than do other branches.

### More hours mean more staff

One of the other hurdles for us as a public library was, and is, the hours of operation. School libraries traditionally open at least 30 minutes before the first class begins. St. Aloysius Gonzaga's first class this year starts at 8:20 am. So far,

we are only opening at 8 a.m. but in future years, as the population of the school reaches its maximum, we may be required to open even earlier, and this does pose a challenge for the library staff. The branch is presently open from 8 am to 9 pm Monday to Friday, 9 am-5 pm on Saturday and 1-5pm on Sunday. Staff work two evenings per week, alternate Saturdays, some Sundays and one 8 am shift per week. Covering all those hours has led to some non-traditional staffing plans, especially when covering lunch and dinner hours.

To meet the needs of this population, Erin Meadows has more part-time staff and slightly higher levels of staff than other locations. We anticipated that reference staff would experience more in-depth reference questions than branch staff customarily handle, so we hired with that in mind. Also, large school libraries customarily hire three staff members, but in this case, the school board provides one teacher-librarian, Donna, so we prepared for a greater interaction with the students.

### A different structure

Our facility differs from others in its management structure. We have a management team, which consists of the manager of the community centre, myself as library manager, the principal of the secondary school and the maintenance manager. We resolve all issues which relate to the facility in terms of cleanliness, repair, security, supervision, finance, parking, room allocation and scheduling. We meet as needed, or quarterly, whichever comes first. Luckily, few major issues have cropped up.

The relationship works among all of the parties because we share a common philosophy about the

function of the facility. The principal, and Donna as teacher-librarian, are committed to maintaining a fairly quiet and quite disciplined environment, for which we are extremely grateful. The students are governed both by Donna as Gonzaga staff, and by the Erin Meadows staff as they are our clients.

In fact, the bigger noise problem, and one which we did not anticipate at all, is with very small children and their parents. Parents will leave their children unattended, the children become frightened and call out, and the parents shout back but do not go to them. It is often difficult to approach parents with discipline issues, as they are often very defensive.

Our library is extremely busy, much busier than anticipated so early in the development of our neighbourhood. Ambient noise levels are often quite high. It is difficult to have quiet study areas, and group project areas, in the midst of enthusiastic children and teens all melded together so that everyone's needs are met. These days, I refer to the library as a 'dynamic' environment!

### More involvement ahead

There are things which we would like to do to further develop our partnership. With the exception of a few joint projects, I have had very little opportunity to get to know the school staff. The Erin Meadows team will, however, become more involved in the preparations for class visits and projects, and do more work with the curriculum and the teacher-librarian in the future.

It is a work in progress, but all in all, this partnership works even better than I dared hope it would. ■