

Gonzaga teachers were running summer courses and tutoring and praised the wonderful services of the Erin Meadows staff when the library was needed. If ever I am busy with students, and there are other students in need of assistance, the approachable staff members help out on the spot.

In fact, whenever I am stymied by a teacher request, I look to the library staff for guidance and direction. The staff is extremely sensitive to the needs of our varied student population. Some of our students are faced with enormous learning challenges, physically, emotionally, and academically.

In other situations, some of these students would not feel comfortable entering a public facility such as a library, but in this case, these students feel welcomed and accepted because they see it as part of their school.

That these interactions take place in a public area with public patrons present, truly promotes partnerships. This mix of community and students is good because it breaks down any barriers.

We naturally worked together on the official opening ceremony of the Erin Meadows Community Centre and Library. The event, which took place on Saturday, September 15, 2001, required a huge number of volunteers. Seventy Gonzaga students offered their services. Whether they supervised games in the parking lot, escorted Mayor Hazel McCallion, cut and doled out pieces of cake, or dressed up as fictional characters, students were on hand to actively participate. Even the school band performed at the ceremony and entertained visitors for the day. The Gonzaga mascot, the Bulldog, was a big hit with youngsters. Gonzaga's Hospitality teacher, Mike Begin, along with his students, baked the cake and prepared other goodies made available on the day. I know that Mary Anne and her staff were delighted and impressed with the students' enthusiasm, good behaviour and willingness to help. They were excellent ambassadors.

The Erin Meadows Library Staff in turn attended Gonzaga's official blessing and mass which was celebrated on Sunday, October 28, 2001. When the school sponsored underprivileged families at Christmas time, the library staff quickly adopted two families. For the Thanksgiving Food Drive 2002, the staff again contributed generously.

Some of the EMC staff have been involved socially with the Gonzaga teaching staff. They have participated in the school's first dinner theatre, played golf in Gonzaga's year-end golf tournament and dropped in for the luncheon specials provided by our food and hospitality classes. I, myself, have joined the EMC staff when they celebrated their Christmas luncheon.

The business side

The Erin Meadows Library staff makes it a point to include me in their daily business. I attend their bi-weekly meetings where I share school news such as dates for sporting activities, school play, Civics', liturgical celebrations, special assemblies and the like. As well, the group gets a chance to voice any concerns that they might have or see developing.

Open communication is key and we have been fortunate enough to have established a very trusting, mutually respectful relationship. Along with forging a close relationship with the Erin Meadows staff, I have also had an opportunity to get to know the area manager, Sharon Moore, who visits the branch on a frequent basis. Sharon has had me come to a Board meeting where I was able to meet members of the board and executive. It is not unusual, either, to have Don Mills, Director of Library Services, drop in for an informal chat or more official business. I was part of the symposium arising out of the OLA's Summit on School Libraries which was held at the Central branch (see page 10). Mary Anne and I both participated in a panel discussion on integrated staff during the OLA Super Conference 2003. It is good to know that people within and outside of this system are monitoring and studying our progress.

We are only at the beginning of our journey. Although we cannot predict our future, we can definitely carve out paths and dream our dreams. I know that from my perspective, the partnership thus far has been rewarding and fulfilling. It won't be a surprise to me when other partnerships of this kind thrive and materialize all over Ontario. ■

