

OPINION

Stouffville
Sun-Tribune

COLUMN

Lending Internet access is hot idea for libraries

We all know our local library is a lot more than books these days.

In fact, as many fans — aka “users” or “patrons” — will tell you, the community library branch is first and foremost a place to be connected.

By that I mean to Internet and, thus, every government service in your town or city, region, province and country.

If you’ve tried to book a timeslot for your teen’s driving test, obtain a birth certificate or SIN document, apply for a job or even register your child for swim lessons, you know all these vital government access points are now online.

Because everybody is online, right?

But does everyone have access to the Internet? No.

A recent article on libraries offering Wi-Fi caught my interest.

Apparently, the New York City Public Library has started offering portable Wi-Fi hotspots to patrons, after a library manager noticed a crowd of people hanging around a closed branch making use of Wi-Fi bleeding from the building.

Instead of thinking that the people were “stealing” from the library, this smart manager decided to do some research on this underserved clientele. He found that in The Big Apple, 27 per cent of residents did not have broadband Internet access at home.

Thus, along with books and videos, patrons at 11 library branches in New York can now check out an Internet device for up to one year.

Closer to home, Kitchener library has a pilot project with 20 devices available, and Toronto Public Libraries, under librarian Vickery Bowles, is apparently budgeting for a similar Wi-Fi lending project in 2016 and asking for private donors to help finance the idea.

Bowles is a Richmond Hill native and, according to the Toronto Star article about library hotspots, feels that Internet access is one of the essential services a library offers its citizens. She points to the fact that residents without Internet access



Marney Beck

are “really at a disadvantage when it comes to employment, looking for a job or access to government services and education”.

We all know this is too true.

Our reporters work weekends when our actual offices are closed, and many find it a challenge to file their stories and photos. They resort to sitting in a coffee shop or — yes — heading to the nearest library branch to send their work to editors.

When a friend was looking for work and moving at the same time, she would walk to the nearest coffee outlet or employment centre for free Wi-Fi to search for jobs and send in resumes.

Just last month, my own husband wanted to buy a Presto transit fare card and, despite wanting to do it the old-fashioned way at a counter with the help of a human being (to get a seniors discount), he was forced to apply online.

Your local library branch, no doubt, has free Internet access and there’s also no doubt it’s popular with patrons.

You don’t always have to be a “patron”. Newmarket library, for example, has three computers for use by visitors who don’t have a library card, and many more workstations and even laptops for use or to borrow to work online.

Markham library branches offer free Internet with no time limits and you don’t even need a password. In Vaughan, each branch has workstations providing free Internet access and, at some branches, you can even reserve a computer.

Looks like lending out Wi-Fi along with books is another idea whose time has come.

Marney Beck is editor of the Richmond Hill/Thornhill Liberal papers.

Ode to Stouffville for 2016

It’s that time of year I once again attempt to wax poetic. If my poetry isn’t meant to be, I ask you to grin and bear it.

It’s not easy filling space with lines that supposedly rhyme

I’ll do my best, even lose much rest and considerable holiday time.

For a Robbie Burns I’m certainly not, nor an Alfred Lorne Tennyson either

But in this spot I’ll give it a shot, just hope it won’t anger my editor.

Jim Mason’s the guy with a very keen eye for what’s acceptable and what is not

With a stroke of his pen it’ll be in a bin, a replacement will quickly be sought.

Looking back with derision is 50-50 vision, for the past is a fact that’s for sure

We cannot undo what’s already been done; any wrongs we now must endure.

Like the set aside toboggan slide that hundreds of children enjoyed

An engineering catastrophe, a fun place our council destroyed.

A successor is now being pressured by our mayor this we know

But it’s anyone’s guess what’s needed most, a park slide or more snow.

There’s Hoover Park and Millard Street, bypass roads we thought

Yet Main Street’s bumper-to-bumper each morning and five o’clock.

Too many vacant stores on Main, yet more plazas still on tap

Stouffville’s downtown makes me frown. No secret to filling the gaps.



Roaming Around

with Jim Thomas

An unsightly dam is a terrible slam on our flood control attempts

A coat of paint by some volunteer saint or maybe a wrought-iron fence.

Safety plight with no slow-down light at the Millard Street school zone approach

Accidents waiting to happen, foreseen by a crossing-guard coach.

And our beautiful downtown park, a ghost site most nights of the week

Replaced if you can believe it by a mosquito-infested tweak.

Back streets lit by candle-power dating back to the ‘50s no doubt

Simple for vandals and thieves to effortlessly roam about.

Negatives are easy to recall, we hear them day after day

This town remains the very best. It’s why families arrive and stay.

Community buoyed by volunteers, food bank and Stouffville Cares

We’re known across the region, as the town that cares and shares.

Main Street decked with

summer flowers, lighted homes at Christmas time

An irrigation system second to none and Musselman’s Lake sublime.

We’re a country close to a city but detached from violent crime

Police aid at our fingertips and a fire department fine.

We’re Music Town, Ontario great choirs and high school band

The symbol’s audible everywhere with welcomes at every hand.

The annual Student Concert now in its 24th year

Mirrors our school-aged talent, from wee ones to teenage peers.

For all our sports enthusiasts, there are games for every age

With hockey, softball and soccer holding centre stage.

A tennis club at Ballant-rae, two skateboard sites for kids

An indoor pool that’s really cool, or warm if that’s your wish.

For golf fanatics take your pick, fine courses surround our town

With a driving range for every age, offering features to astound.

Let’s not forget the lawn-bowlers, not only for seniors like me

From teenage up to 90, you’ll enjoy the company.

Excluding this poetic trial, I hope to keep writing this column.

Jim Thomas is a Stouffville resident who has written for area newspapers for more than 60 years.

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1-855-853-5613

Delivery inquiries:
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