

Eden Prairie tops in Hennepin County Library circulation

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Eden Prairie Library is the leader of the pack in circulation among Hennepin County's 41 libraries.

On a prominent hillside spot near Eden Prairie Center, in what was once a Lunds grocery store, the Eden Prairie Library last year checked out 1,348,682 books and materials -- more than the regional libraries at Ridgedale, Maple Grove, Southdale and the Minneapolis Central Library, which has a far larger collection.

The library has claimed the top circulation spot for years, even in other less choice locations, said Eden Prairie Mayor Nancy Tyra-Lukens.

"I think 10 or 15 years ago I would have said it was because of our young population. Moms were going in there getting 16 books in a bag," Tyra-Lukens said.

Now she credits the circulation demand to a good library location, the demographics of the community and a well-functioning library building.

"I think the library has done a great job. It's a real

inviting space," she said.

The only thing it needs, she said, is more parking.

Dillon Young, one of the library's senior librarians, reported the library's leading circulation to the City Council recently. Eden Prairie's collection is smaller than many other libraries, "but our customers continue to use it more than any other library in the system," he said.

And its clientele is growing: Last year, Eden Prairie issued 6,611 new library cards.

The fact that the library is open seven days a week helps explain its soaring circulation, Young said. "We are open what I've always kind of referred to as mall hours: Monday through Thursday 10 to 9, Friday and Saturday 10 to 5 and Sunday noon to 5."

Internet technology now makes a lot of library patrons invisible, Young said. They look through the catalog and reserve books online, and when they come in to pick up the materials, they "use the express checkout to check it out themselves."

Young came to Eden Prairie last January from the Brookdale Library, which has the highest computer use in the system. "That is what made Brookdale run," he said.

In Eden Prairie, it's a constant demand for materials. "The library is used," Young said. "We have a lot of families." Circulation of children's books is about 500,000 a year.

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Focusing on early literacy for children, helping teens with homework and services aimed at seniors, the library stays in contact with the Eden Prairie school system, the senior center, immigrant services and Friends of the Library, Young said. "The community and the library and all the other organizations really stay on each other's radars."

"We also have tons of volunteers," Young said. Last year, more than 100 volunteers put in 7,000 hours in the Eden Prairie Library.

The library is important to people in Eden Prairie and "it really keeps you on your toes to help give what the community wants," Young said.

With the parking lot full and a buzz in the building, the library staff leaves at the end of the day "knowing that we are appreciated and there is value in what we do," Young said.

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