

Get your 'Library Anywhere' card

By Jill Fuller

Several years ago, I was visiting a library when a library visitor pulled out his wallet and showed me his first library card. The small, square card was ragged and yellowed, but the man was obviously proud of it. After all, he had held onto it for over 50 years, so it must have meant something to him. As a librarian, I often hear stories from people about their childhood memories of the library — the books they brought home, the librarians who read to them, and their pride in receiving their first card. I didn't think to keep my first library card, which I got when I was a child, but I've accumulated more over the years as I've moved to different towns or states. The cards I still have act as a visual record of the places I've called home.

In Massachusetts, a young immigrant working in a textile mill named Andrew Carnegie wanted access to the books at the local library, but he couldn't afford the subscription fee to become a member, nor were low-income wage-earners allowed to come into the library. The teenage Carnegie wrote a letter to the



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local paper, which was so persuasive that the library changed its policies. When Carnegie, as a successful businessperson, started funding the building of over 1,500 libraries across the country, he said, "A library outranks any other one thing a community can do to benefit its people. It is a never failing spring in the desert."

September is National Library Card Signup Month, and the public libraries in Waukesha County are excited to get library cards into their communities. Although a library card may seem insignificant, it represents something powerful — the fundamental American concept of free and equal access to opportunities. It's more than just a card. It is your "Library Anywhere" card, so you can read ebooks, digital audiobooks, and magazines without leaving home. It's your "Borrow, Don't Buy" card, saving you money every time you borrow something from the library. It's your "Learn New Skills" card, connecting you to online classes where you can

learn a new language, brush up on your computer skills, or practice grant writing. It's your "Job Search Help" card, making the job hunt a bit easier with free resume building tools, computer/printer access, and online courses. It's your "Stay Connected" card, allowing you to take the Internet home with you when you check out a WiFi hotspot. Now more than ever, as we all struggle with the impact of this extraordinary year, a library card is a free lifeline to resources, entertainment, and connection.

If you would like to get a library card, you can sign up for a digital one at www.GetYourLibraryCard.org or you can stop into your local library to sign up for a card. If you already have a library card, we're glad to hear it! Consider helping our mission by encouraging a friend or family member to get their own library card. Spread the word about what your library card means to you!

(Jill Fuller is the coordinator of marketing & communications for the Bridges Library System.)