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It's Not Just a Library, It's a Destination

By Laurie Snyder



The Orinda Library's staff and volunteers match Orindans with great books, uncover answers to life's most puzzling questions, and patiently teach even the least tech savvy to use e-readers. From left: Robbin Milne, Lin Look, Ramineh Mousseli, Bonnie Sanders, Sandy Jones, Nadine Imada, Beth Girshman, Eric Ralphs, Ruth Boyer, Eric Lee. Photo Ohlen Alexander

friends, your neighbors ... people with children ... people working on their novels."

Adult and Teen Services Librarian Ruth Boyer concurs. "We know that people are saying, 'Let's meet at the Library.'" If something isn't happening at one facility, they often find it at another.

Seats at the ground floor coffee shop and cafe are hard to come by most mornings and afternoons - as are spaces at library computers upstairs at peak times. Even parking lots at restaurants across the street are often packed. "Anything that can generate the ability of so many people to come to a destination for 65 hours a week, seven days a week ... any destination that's open that much can't help but bring people into an area," says Girshman of the library's contribution to this vitality.

The latest infusion of energy is likely to come via the Winter Music Series. Modeled on the library's well attended summer series, Boyer hopes the new winter concerts will motivate locals to venture forth on dark, chilly nights. The events kick off Dec. 5 with mellow guitar music, followed by Jazz in January, and the romantic strains of violin just in time for Valentine's Day - all enhanced by the glow and warmth of the library's fireplace. Because Orinda's library is generally such a "peaceful, contemplative environment," says Girshman, "it's a little unexpected to have music ... but it works."

The library also boasts a Mystery Book Club, which meets the third Friday of every month. Boyer describes the club as "very vibrant." New members are always welcome, as are diverse opinions. "You don't have to love a book," she says. When a debate ensues, it "brings conversation to the table."

The music series and many other programs are underwritten by the Friends of the Orinda Library (FOL), which raises a significant amount of money each year through operation of a book store, a membership program, monthly book sales, and other initiatives. FOL's efforts also support additions to Orinda's holdings over and above those provided by the Contra Costa library system - a system recently awarded the prestigious National Medal of Honor by the Institute of Museum and Library Services. FOL will host a special holiday book sale Dec. 8 before kicking off a major membership drive this January.

And as always, says Girshman, "The best way that people can support the library is to use it."

Tweens on commando missions huddling to complete school assignments. Sun worshippers in search of beach book nirvana. Do-it-yourself-dads trying to figure out how to undo what they just did to a drain pipe. The budding poet who doesn't know it. Tiny tots toting books twice their size, impatiently tugging mom-hands toward book check-out.

Orindans clearly love their library. More than 13,000 of the city's 17,643 residents are cardholders. Compared with other book-lending institutions across the area, that's a fairly impressive figure. In 2011 alone, the total circulation of the Orinda Library reached nearly a quarter of a million.

But those numbers can't come close to painting the Picasso of one of Orinda's most beloved institutions. Part of a complex that includes the Orinda Community Center, adjoining parks and tennis courts, Orinda's Historical Society, Chamber of Commerce, and Caffe Teatro, the library is patronized not only by well-read residents and parents helping their children hone their research and study skills, but by non-Orindans dropping in after dance workouts and OCC classes, friends meeting for lunch, and lifelong learners arriving for will and trust workshops, computer training, and even toddler yoga. Art on display in the Library Gallery can be enjoyed by all.

One only need sit outside the facility on any given day or evening to witness the synergy taking place. "It's a very fun atmosphere," says Beth Girshman, senior community library manager. "I think that ideally the Library is the fifth place - a gathering place open, free, safe. You see your

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