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### A new hot spot for job hunters -- the library

**Libraries nationwide are reporting heavy use of services, including job-hunting clinics**

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For the past five or six years, the Long Island Development Corp. has been sponsoring seminars at the Middle Country Public Library in Centereach to help job seekers and small businesses navigate a variety of issues.

"There are probably two seminars a year, and we get about 20 people or so for each seminar," said Sandy Feinberg, director of the library.

This year is the exception.

Nearly 100 people registered for the Bethpage nonprofit's latest seminar at the Middle Country location, Feinberg said. "That's a big change," she said, "and it tells me that people are turning to their libraries for not just books and movies, but for all types of services." [See how your community funds your library](#)

Largely because of the recession, libraries nationwide are reporting increased traffic and circulation - the term for checking out books, DVDs and videos. Long Island libraries, including the Middle Country branch, are part of the trend, but locally it's less about borrowing the latest bestselling book or popular film and more about looking for work, updating resumes and researching state and federal programs, library officials say.

What's happening, said Kevin Verbese -- director of the Suffolk County Library Cooperative, which helps the county's 56 library districts share resources -- is that people are flocking to their neighborhood libraries because they offer the best value in town.

"They provide so many things to so many different people," Verbese said, "plus, they're open a ton of hours and virtually everything is free."

Hector Torres, 50, was just logging onto a computer recently in the Job Education Center of the Freeport Memorial Library. Torres, who has been out of work off and on for about three years because of heart problems, said he now goes to the library almost daily to read papers in Spanish and English and to look for jobs online.



"This library is very good because they have many areas of service," he said.

In Suffolk County, where more than 950,000 people with cards check out more than 11 million items in a year, libraries saw a circulation increase of about 4 percent, from 2007 to 2008, Verbesey said.

In Nassau County, circulation was up 8 percent from the fall of 2007 to the same period last year, according to Mary Beth Beidl, assistant director of the Nassau Library System, which covers 54 member libraries, nearly 750,000 card-carrying patrons and 10 million items borrowed annually.

"People turn to libraries for a lot of things in hard times," Beidl said. Some Nassau libraries offer seminars on how to file for property-tax relief, she said, and interest in that service has grown tremendously.

More patrons are using the Middle Country branch, Feinberg said, to find mortgage assistance and even distribute resumes. The branch also allows patrons free computer use and Internet access with a swipe of their library cards. "We've had more people update their cards so they can use the computers."

Edward Elenausky, who has been director of the Emma S. Clark Memorial Library in Setauket for 18 years, said his experience tells him libraries on Long Island traditionally have more traffic than libraries in other parts of the country.

"We've had an annual growth of about 1 to 2 percent for the last few years now," Elenausky said of his branch's circulation figures. "That kind of growth is pretty common." More telling, Elenausky said, was the attendance this past summer for many of the branch's children's programs, like storytimes for preschoolers and parent-toddler workshops.

"We were packed," he said. "People traveled less, so they took advantage of the library's programs."

Across Long Island, circulation increases can vary appreciably. While it's predictably steady in Setauket, Lindenhurst and Freeport have seen circulation figures spike by double digits.

Some people are turning to their libraries to borrow books, DVDs and CDs instead of buying them at Border's and Amazon.com, published reports say. But that only explains a small portion of the rise in traffic.

Peter Ward, director of the Lindenhurst Memorial Library, where circulation figures for December 2008 compared with December 2007 are up about 11.5 percent, said it's almost a blue-collar fact that "working people use the library to get back on track, whether it's finding a new job or researching information. In hard times, you'll find the public library is even more of a valuable resource."

The recession has made a library regular out of Kathryn Schneider, who two weeks ago lost her job as an executive assistant at an electronics distributor.

Schneider, 63, who was updating her resume at the Lindenhurst library recently, said she's there Monday through Friday, as opposed to the twice-a-month visits she made when she was working. She doesn't have a home computer, so the time available on a library computer is a godsend, she said.

"It's always available for two-hour slots," Schneider said. And, she added, "It's quiet."

In Freeport, director David Opatow said computer usage is way up, and circulation figures for December 2008 were up about 11 percent over December 2007. Like many of his fellow directors, Opatow agreed

that more people are using libraries for educational seminars, especially those that help people switch careers.

"It's a shame the increases are happening at a time of economic crisis," he said. "But the truth is, people become more aware of their library's resources in times like these."

*Staff writer Carrie Mason-Draffen contributed to this story.*

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