Leadership and Management Section (LAMS)

Officers

President
Lauren Comito

President Elect
Frank Rees

Immediate Past President
Gillian Thorpe

Secretary
Robert Carle

Treasurer
Ed Falcone

Web Liaison
Frank Rees

At Large Board Members
Claudia Depkin
Rebecca Lubin
Julie Dempsey
Barbara Madonna

To submit an article read the JLAMS editorial policy on our website at: www.nyla.org/lams
Then send an eMail proposal to: naylor@ColonieLibrary.org

CONTENTS

3 President’s and Editor’s Message

4 Hail and Farewell by Carol Anderson

5 Introduction: by Carol Anne Germain

7 How Queens Library Returned a Library in a Challenged Community Back Into a Safe Haven by Nicolas Buron, Yves Etheart et al

16 Mastics-Moriches-Shirley Library Response after Superstorm Sandy By Kerri Rosalia

22 Serving A Public Library Community After A Natural Disaster: Recovering From Hurricane Sandy by Maureen M. Garvey

32 How the Westbury Library Helped the Community after Hurricane Sandy by Cathleen A. Merenda

35 Mahopac Public Library and Sandy by Patricia Kaufman

37 Pawling Library: The Library as Community Safety Net by Scott Jarzombek

39 Community Afloat: A Ship’s Library, a Place of Refuge By Constantia Constantinou and Shafeek Fazal
Welcome to this special issue on the library as refuge. JLAMS, the electronic Journal of the Leadership and Management Section of the New York Library Association, is ending its eleventh year and we are happy to introduce the Spring 2015 issue. Carol Anne Germain, Information Literacy Librarian at the University at Albany, writes the introduction and together with Carol Anderson takes over as co-editors with the Fall 2015 issue.

This issue is dedicated to all the libraries and library staff whose dedication to their communities shone forth during recent emergencies and natural disasters such as Sandy as well as those who as at the Queens Library take on serious community problems to maintain their libraries as places of refuge and opportunity.

JLAMS provides a valuable outlet for the dissemination of ideas, articles, academic papers, and essays of interest to library leaders at all levels and of all types of libraries: academic, public, school and special libraries. As library leaders, we have a lot in common, but we have few places to share in detail what we know and what we learn. JLAMS was the first peer-reviewed journal in NYLA, and the original editorial board set a high standard for the publication and we are proud to maintain that standard. Readers of JLAMS are well-served by our team of referees, as are those whose contributions are published here. For the high quality and value of JLAMS to be continued your submissions are vitally important. For information on article submissions, editorial policy, a submission form and more, visit the JLAMS website page at www.nyla.org/lams.

JLAMS is made possible by your membership in NYLA and in LAMS. LAMS receives funding based upon the number of NYLA members who select LAMS as their primary NYLA section, as well as by those who pay an additional $7.00 to add LAMS as a secondary section.
With this issue, we say “farewell and hail” to Richard Naylor as the creator of JLAMS and as editor of JLAMS since its initial publication in 2003. Richard has edited twenty issues of JLAMS and along this journey has nurtured many authors and contributors to JLAMS.

Years ago, Richard strongly “thought NYLA should have more than a bulletin.” He followed this idea and created JLAMS. His intention for the journal was that it would provide New York and other librarians with "access to some of the wonderful thinking and research taking place in the Empire State. In addition to helping to disseminate best practices and best thinking, we wanted to encourage research in library science within the state, nurture research abilities, and help improve professional writing among our peers."

In 2003, Richard ran the journal proposal past several NYLA members and received some positive responses - it was, and still is a great idea! He solicited input from others in the library field and including a professor from Syracuse’s School of Information Studies. That individual recommended a semi-annual publication schedule; Richard is "eternally grateful for that advice.” Over the years, he has been deeply committed to JLAMS, working diligently to locate publishable research/articles and find talented reviewers.

Richard recollects many "high points" for the journal, including the upload of back issues to the database Library, Information Science & Technology Abstracts with Full Text and "when some of our articles were cited in other journals' articles.”

Thank you, Richard for having the vision to create JLAMS and for shepherding its production for more than a decade.

Now that we have covered the “farewell,” we say “Hail” to Richard who will be contributing a regular column on leadership to JLAMS. “Leadership is in our name,” says Richard, “and we really need to do more focusing on leadership issues.” Look for Richard’s first leadership column in the Fall 2015 issue of JLAMS.

Carol Lee Anderson
The *Oxford English dictionary* defines the term refuge as "shelter or protection from danger or trouble."

From this definition, most individuals would not think of libraries as a place of refuge. Libraries have traditionally been viewed as community centers that provide access to books, multimedia materials, online resources and programming. They support educational as well as entertainment initiatives. So it may seem odd to think of them as centers of refuge - where patrons will come for "shelter or protection." However, in many circumstances, New York libraries have come forward to provide service in this capacity. This includes providing safe spaces for youngsters and young adults in challenged communities and to New Yorkers who have experienced extreme weather catastrophes, including Hurricanes Sandy and Irene (a tropical storm in upstate New York).

In this issue of JLAMS, focusing on *The Library as Refuge*, the articles highlight how New York-based libraries have served as points of refuge. In the article by staff members of the Queens Library at South Hollis, the authors outline the difficulties with delivering services and a safe space for teenagers and young adults in their troubled geographic area. The writers provide sound advice on making the library an inviting and safe environment for patrons, regardless of outside struggles.

Many of the articles in this issue highlight the experiences libraries encountered with Hurricane Sandy - one of the most devastating natural disasters in New York State. During that time, these libraries met user needs by offering a safe haven. Patrons found that libraries extended their hours so users could charge their devices, get warm, access the Internet, and find shelter during a time of danger. At the Mahopac Public, a patron charged their oxygen machine - surely a happy patron!

After the hurricane, the Pawling Library offered New York City commuters working space since travel options were inadequate. Several libraries developed post-hurricane collaborations with key relief agencies. Examples include the partnership between Bellmore Memorial Library and the South Nassau Hospital on Project Hope (funded by FEMA), which delivered crisis counseling assistance to residents experiencing emotional distress and the alliance between Mastics-Moriches-Shirley Community Library with the Small Business Development Center at Stony Brook which facilitated guidance to businesses about storm recovery grants.

The final article covers the refuge efforts of the SUNY Maritime College Ship's Library. For this vessel, helping during a natural disaster was not a new experience; the college's ship had previously been commissioned to deliver emergency services during the attacks of September 11th, as well as for Hurricane Katrina. During all of these disasters, this floating library has transformed itself into a place of refuge for emergency workers, social workers and volunteers, so they can effectively maneuver relief efforts, in addition to using the library for well-deserved relaxation.

While I hope that New Yorker libraries will experience limited encounters with disasters and difficult community situations, this JLAMS issue will provide library professionals with needed insight into dealing with those trying
conditions. Of particular interest is the use of a Disaster Recovery Plan noted in the Westbury Memorial Library article - a beneficial tool for ALL libraries.

Since I am a librarian I am always looking for patterns. After reading the articles in this issue of JLAMS, what surfaced in all of the pieces is the dedication and commitment demonstrated by the energies of the individuals who work in New York libraries. And while they are not first responders, they are certainly front line responders and their efforts are commendable. I

As highlighted in the articles, natural and other disasters can be devastating. During these crises, libraries have served as beacons of hope for the public. In an effort of support these efforts, NYLA has assisted libraries through its Library Disaster Relief Fund. The objective of this fund is to provide financial assistance to New York libraries that have been damaged or destroyed by natural or manmade disasters like hurricanes, fire, flooding, Nor'easters, etc. Past donations have been used to repair library buildings, replace destroyed library items, and much more. If you wish to add to this fund, please make a donation through the online form at http://www.nyla.org/max/4DCGI/donate/form.html

How Queens Library Returned a Library in a Challenged Community Back Into a Safe Haven

By Nicolas Buron, Yves Etherton, Charlene Vicks, Nina Luca Bolowsky, and Joanne King

Abstract: Queens Library at South Hollis is located in an area challenged by social issues, which impacted library service and adversely affected its ability to be an intellectual and physical refuge. Unruly teens disrupted library service in the after school hours and discouraged others from coming to the library. Using a combination of changes to the physical layout, staff training, best practices from other libraries, dedication of the staff and the buy-in of community stakeholders, the library was returned to a welcoming community service.

Introduction

Queens Library serves 2.3 million people in one of the most diverse counties in the nation from 62 community libraries, 5 adult learning centers, 2 family literacy centers and a teen library. While the county is one of the city’s most upwardly mobile, it has pockets of high need. Over the past decade, the community of South Hollis (among other neighborhoods) had high rates of foster care placement and special education placement in the local schools also higher than average. As various social issues and difficulties plagued the area and the families who live in the neighborhoods surrounding the library, problems began to seep into the library itself in the form of disruptive behavior by children, teens, and even troubled adults.

The library is located between several neighborhood schools. “The schools are overpacked, they have middle school, junior high school, and high school together across

Nicolas Buron is Vice President of Public Library Services at Queens Library. He can be reached at nburon@queenslibrary.org
the street,” says Charlene Vicks, Customer Service Supervisor at the South Hollis library and a staff member there since 2011. “We’re surrounded by elementary schools as well, and then the children that don’t even live in the neighborhood, they come, they just flood into here.”

People who wanted to use the library for quiet study or computer use were being driven away. Children who looked to the library for safe harbor after school were encountering many of the same problems in the library as they did outside. The staff was frustrated. Queens Library’s philosophy is to partner with law enforcement and community stakeholders to ameliorate such problems, but to avoid a steady police presence within the library unless there is no other alternative. The disruptive environment in the library at South Hollis was pervasive. It seemed to defy past tried and true methods of improvement. The library had called meetings of faith-based organizations and school officials to try to find a solution. While everyone agreed that action was needed, no one had a viable action plan.

OBJECTIVES

The objectives were to take control of the atmosphere within the library so the whole community would feel welcome; to support the staff who work there and give them the training and resources they needed to maintain an appropriate library environment; to positively engage with law enforcement and other community stakeholders; to keep Queens Library as an asset and a refuge for the whole community.

METHODS

As one of the smaller library locations in Queens, South Hollis had a staff of 4 full-time workers, who, when school ended, would often have to deal with close to 100 customers, nearly all of them teenagers and children. Children and teenagers who wanted to be in the library, either to use computers or attend programs or do their homework, were often impeded by others who were being disruptive. The community does not offer many open or accessible places for children and teens to go after school, and they depended on the library for a safe, supportive space to go. The library system as a whole had suffered budget cuts for eight successive years. To avoid reducing public service hours, a hiring freeze had been in effect. Staff had been reduced by more than 20%. Hiring additional people was not a possibility.

“When anybody, but teenagers especially, think: ‘we got away with this yesterday, can we get away with it today, and will we be able to get away with it tomorrow,’ it starts to spiral a little bit out of control,” says Nicolas Buron, Vice President of Public Library Service. “The staff absolutely tried their best to maintain order, but we had incidents rise to the level where we had to call the police on an ongoing basis.”
These are people who are librarians and clerks. They don’t have social work degrees. They’re not psychiatrists. They’re not security people. They weren’t able to do library work,” says Nina Luca Bolowsky, Occupation Risk Specialist at Queens Library.

Part of Luca Bolowsky’s job at Queens Library is addressing customer injuries and accidents at library locations. She noticed a spike in incidents at South Hollis during the school year of 2012-2013, and she asked to be assigned to help. She saw a staff at their wits’ end, overwhelmed and underequipped to deal with the emotional toll of repeated fights, intoxicated customers and drug paraphernalia being hidden in library stacks.

“It got to the point at South Hollis where the problems were so severe, they were preventing any kind of positive engagement with the teens. When you have issues with teens who are disruptive, not only is it impossible to engage them, they’re preventing the other teens from using the space effectively,” says Vikki Terrile, Director of Community Library Services at Queens Library. That directly contradicts what the library hopes to be: an oasis and a welcoming environment for all.

Terrile has been involved with South Hollis since she started as a Young Adult coordinator at Queens Library in 2008. In the fall of 2013, she held a program a week with teens and tweens at South Hollis and also helped out on the floor in general.

“I would just do my job and leave. And I stood in the midst of this and I just felt like, there’s nothing that I can do. I felt like that for a long time.” Said Charlene Vicks.

The tipping point was an incident in 2013, when a boy in the library’s Children’s Room was robbed by two teenagers in the middle of the afternoon, and his iPad and backpack were stolen. Vicks and many others have cited this as a rallying point for the staff.

“If I can’t protect the children, why am I here?” Vicks recalls saying to herself. “And we all got on board.”

**Taking Steps**

Vicks and the South Hollis staff appealed to the Queens Library administration for help, and in July 2013, a Summit Meeting was held with department heads from across the Queens Library system and the staff of South Hollis. It included all the departments with supporting roles in South Hollis, the community library services administration, program and service managers, outreach and youth enrichment staff, supervisors and managers from other library locations who had experienced similar issues at their branches, and representatives from human resources, security management, facilities management, and health and safety.

The South Hollis staff appreciated the chance to tell their stories about the issues at the branch. It resulted in a list of recommendations, with input from across the library system. Vicks and her fellow staff members, along with Luca Bolowsky, Terrile and others, began to implement them. They were determined to make the library a place of refuge once again.
“I felt super supported with presenting ideas,” says Luca Bolowsky. “It was a wonderful feeling to be able to try solutions and not be afraid to fail in them.”

A. Physical Solutions

The South Hollis library was renovated in 2009, and the section of the library designated for teens was placed at the front of the library, near the windows that faced the street. Terrile remembered thinking that placement was less than optimal — and, in the fall of 2013, two teenage boys “horsing around” in the Teen Area went through the front window.

Because of the design of the library and the flow-through, patrons had to go through the Children’s Room to reach the Program Room in the back. Teens were constantly running back and forth through the Children’s Room, which led to disrupting the younger children.

The decision was made to switch the Teen Area from the front of the library to the back, which provided more space for the teens and discouraged distractions and visibility from the outside. This also improved the line of sight from the circulation and reference desks to the Teen Area.

“Someone mentioned that teens don’t like round tables; they like square ones because you can fit more people around them. So we made that switch. Little, simple things like that mattered,” says Luca Bolowsky.

The shelving units in the main stacks were reoriented, from horizontal to vertical, to improve lines of sight and prevent people from hiding drugs and contraband behind the books.

Short shelving units were moved to the front of the Children’s Room to deliberately create a bottleneck, with a staff person dedicated to this new “gate” to the Children’s Room after 3 p.m.

These alterations had a ripple effect. Moving the Teen Area led to the staff moving the teen collection of books to the back wall, which made them more accessible. Moving the main stacks made it easier for patrons to go around the Children’s Room to get to the Program Room, which helped secure the new bottleneck “gate.” The gate allows a single staff member to key an eye on and control ingress and egress into the area.

B. Programming and Customer Interaction

One of the lessons shared by staff members from other library branches was the importance of greeting patrons at the door when they entered the library. It creates a connection with regular library customers and discourages those who may want to keep a low profile because of previous incidents or current intentions of malfeasance.

This strategy is particularly effective with teenage customers. In most libraries, you see the same kids every day. When people of all ages feel a personal connection with library staff, it becomes harder for
them to be disrespectful. And a respectful atmosphere is requisite for a library to be the “bridge over troubled waters” for so many of the teens.

At 3 p.m., the busiest time of day for the branch, South Hollis staff librarians meet people at the door and greet the patrons. “We took an interest in them, and then they start coming to you. They come in, and I get more hugs – and more colds! – and they care,” says Vicks. “Our Customer Service Representative saw a young lady come in who was very angry, and he talked with her. She needed that, someone to talk to, someone to take an interest. She came back, and her whole demeanor was better, much better.”

Charlene Vicks was cited as particularly strong at connecting with local parents and getting them as involved as possible in any issues or problems that might arise with their children at the library.

Children’s services representatives came in to talk to staff members about how to support families in the community and help them alleviate stressors at home. It’s an ongoing issue for schools to teach kids while dealing with external stressors and their consequences, even with the resources they may have. For the library, it can be even more of an issue, since the library has a looser connection with the parents.

Many children and teenagers would come in hungry after 3 p.m., which added to their fractious behavior. A higher-than-average population of foster children means that they often are not given keys to the home, and effectively have nowhere to go but the library after school. A donor supplied healthy snacks for them. The snacks were also linked to program attendance and used to incentivize positive behavior. By providing food and shelter, the library was creating a nurturing environment that everyone, everywhere appreciates and that so many of these young people need.

Terrile and the librarians at South Hollis have worked to develop strong programming for children, so that the ones who have an early positive experience with the library will become teens and tweens who keep expecting good things from the library. “Rap sessions” for teens and separate girls’ and boys’ meetings were developed for teens to talk about their problems.

A demographic study of the neighborhood revealed that its composition was changing to newly arrived Haitian immigrants, so programs were developed to reach out to them. Two staff members speak Haitian Creole, which was a huge asset. Career development workshops through Queens Library’s Job and Business Academy were also increased at the branch, and regular visits from a health screening van were scheduled.

C. Strengthening the Staff

The most important part of any library branch is the staff who work there every day. With the issues at South Hollis, one of the most important ways to address the situation was to strengthen the staff — not just in terms of their abilities or practices, but providing support for them.

“The regular assigned staff showed up every day, and did the best they could through the worst of it,” says Terrile. “We got more complaints from the temporarily assigned staff, sent there to help out, than the regular staff. They were all willing to see it through. But it takes its toll. Even when things aren’t going badly, the fear of what might happen is there.”

It was recognized by everyone involved that the staff were often pressed into social service roles that they weren’t trained for, and that they were experiencing high levels of emotional distress.

To combat staff anxiety, doctoral students from St. John’s University were brought in to counsel the staff as well as to provide in-service training in intervention and de-escalation skills, self-care, identifying family needs, stress management and self-preservation. They learned how to take care of themselves while dealing with such large social issues. “The staff really liked the training from St. John’s. They
needed resources on how to de-escalate certain situations,” says Buron. After the initial training, the staff have phone numbers to call for subsequent counseling and a wealth of materials from the counselors.

Another important step was getting the staff working as a team to establish firm rules of customer behavior in the library, and enforce those rules in a consistent manner. Staff decided whether teens could make phone calls from inside the library, what manner of dress was permitted, more stringent rules for computer usage, the cut-off age for the Children’s Room, and how best to deal with intoxicated or disruptive patrons. Vicks talks often of the policy of asking disruptive teens to “take the day off, but come back tomorrow and I’ll be right here to welcome you.”

“One of the things that the staff started doing that worked well was to back each other up, so that nobody was ever confronting a problem by themselves, which made it harder to play the staff off of each other,” says Terille.

“It was incredible watching the staff form this team and change things. It was amazing,” says Luca Bolowsky.

“We all came together, and we’re so close and can read each other, and know when to step in,” says Vicks. “And I thank the administration for all their help, because it started the ball rolling.”

The staff level was ultimately increased as soon as the budget permitted, standing now at 3 full-time librarians (including a children’s librarian), and a customer service supervisor, clerk and specialist.

“We’re sort of at a crossroads right now, because we lost a very good library manager [to a job outside of public libraries]. It’s a great opportunity to make a difference to a community in need, says Buron.

**Dealing With Setbacks**

The suggested recommendations were implemented for a year, and accident reports dropped, but there were times when incidents were still spiking.

“Some days it was good, and some days it looked like we had never done anything,” says Luca Bolowsky.

Even with an increased staff, the library schedule worked in such a way that staff members would get a day off during the school week, because everyone is “on deck” on Saturday.

The Friday before Memorial Day 2014, an incident with one notorious teen patron led to theft and a large multi-person fight inside the library. Police were forced to close the building and escorting staff to their cars after work.

During that summer, a decision was made reluctantly to hire a temporary paid police detail for the library. Except for the largest locations, Queens Libraries generally do not have dedicated security personnel.

“The police detail has been a real help. It’s been a deterrent,” says Vicks. “And they work hand in hand with the staff. We know them, and it’s a comfortable fit.”

Still, both the South Hollis staff and library administration realize that the paid detail is not a long-term solution. “It’s a very disturbing thing to go into a library and see an officer with a gun,” says Terille. “It can feel like a failure.” And it certainly does not foster the kind of welcoming environment that the library seeks.

“The paid detail has helped, but it is something that we don’t like to do, because it doesn’t fix the situation. It’s something we look at as temporary,” says Buron.
The library has also tried to involve the South Hollis community in its efforts to deal with these issues. There have been partnerships with local organizations like churches, the local foster care agency and schools — including stakeholder meetings attended by members of the community and sending staff members to PTA meetings at local schools — but these efforts have been less successful than the staff would like.

RESULTS

Today, the branch is stable. Community members and families who “rushed in and out” of the branch before are now returning, bringing their families. They once again are beginning to see Queens Library at South Hollis as a place of refuge.

“The air is light now. It used to be so thick, you could cut it with a knife,” says Vicks. “An older lady came to us and said, ‘Thank you for taking the library back.’ But we weren’t here to control children. We were here to make library cards, share information, check out books — library work. But then it got in our heads, ‘You have to do more.’”

“What the recommendations told us, and what we had learn from a couple of other library locations, is that sometimes it’s staffing, sometimes it’s physical layout, sometimes it’s the number of people present on the floor at any given time, so knowing that, we were really able to turn around, and that helped us as a guide here,” says Buron.

There were several months where anytime Vikki Terille’s cell phone rang, she panicked, because she thought it was an issue with South Hollis. She doesn’t have that worry anymore.

Terille also like to share the time when she overheard an adult librarian having a candid, relaxed conversation with a young boy on the library floor about the Cold War. “There’s so much that we don’t know about the community, but with the right support and staffing and resources, I don’t think those things will continue to be true,” she says.

Lessons Learned

A Strong Staff is Key

- A constant mantra has been that the library staff has to act as a team, with diligence, setting expectations for acceptable behavior from customers and being consistent with them. The library staff do, however, have to be empowered to make decisions and exceptions on a case-by-case basis.

- Personal connections formed between staff and customers by regular engagement can provide some of the ballast for stability.

- There has to be continuous involvement in the well-being of all staff members. They have to feel supported by the administration, that there is enough physical support in the library. They must be trained to deal with difficult situations.
The South Hollis staff huddle before the doors open for the day, and touch on points to remember. Teamwork is seen as the biggest part of what they do. “There’s no ‘I,’ it’s ‘we,’” says Vicks. “Everybody has something to bring to the table, but you have to really have it in you, to care.”

Members of the staff can still have different styles and approaches and engage customers in their own way. “Where do your unique gifts fit in?” says Terille. “When everyone brings their gifts in, it tends to be a blanket that covers everything.”

Everyone also agreed that “the manager sets the tone,” and that a library branch needs a leader who has their own ideas but will also go with what has worked so far.

Be Open to All Ideas

The South Hollis staff and the employees cited in this study weren’t afraid of what they didn’t know. They sought out guidance from other librarians, other community libraries, other managers, outside partnerships (principals, parent associations), and anyone else they could think of. The experiences at other community libraries which had dealt with similar issues informed the actions taken at South Hollis.

“The library has so many resources here, and so many smart people that come with different life experiences, that it was not ‘let’s stick to policy and procedure.’ It wasn’t about that. This was about, ‘Let’s think outside the box,’ and we have to literally submerge ourselves into the community to find out what’s going on. We had to tap into the resources that we have in our organization, open it up and don’t make it so quiet. We needed to make it an organizational and global thing.” (Nina Luca Bolowsky)

The Summit Meeting model has helped Queens Library deal with issues like the ones in South Hollis effectively, and have involved people who work directly with affected communities to give their perspective and advice. Other library staffs, included South Hollis, are also invited to bring their experiences to their peers.

The Summit Meeting is a safe space where staff can “spill it all” and communicate what’s inside of them – it can come out emotionally, but that’s okay. People who work in administrative capacities and not in public service can also have the experiences that can be valuable.

Something as small as changing physical environments and moving shelving units around can be effective. Don’t be afraid to do so.

Libraries are More than They Seem

It’s common knowledge by now for the people who work and advocate for them, but contemporary libraries are often asked to do a lot more than lend books and videos in their communities.

“So much of what caused the problems in the South Hollis library has nothing to do with the library. These are not issues that are unique to Queens; they’re not unique to urban libraries; and doing more with less because of budget cuts happens everywhere.” (Vikki Terille)

As libraries are asked to do more with less, being able to adapt is key. A combination of staff team building, library organizations working together, and reaching out to external resources (schools, community nonprofits, churches) outside library walls can effectively power that adaptability.
Going Forward

The process of “fixing” the issues at South Hollis is ongoing and cyclical, according to all involved. Since August 2014, there hasn’t been a long-term permanent library manager, but a series of temporary ones, which makes long-term planning difficult.

The paid police detail is still present, but not necessary over the summer, when the library is “a different world.” An ideal proposed model would be part-time afterschool staff, recruited from the local schools, who know the young people and can interact with them; role models who have worked well with the children that frequent the library and would successfully engage them. The library hopes to implement that soon.

Another proposed staffing plan still in development would see social work interns or volunteers who would lend their expertise to the customers at South Hollis. A full-time youth counselor or YA librarian who can engage with the branch’s teens on their issues would also be a big help; there are none on staff right now.

The library will continue to reach out to the community, schools and churches. The social services and foster care agency near the library has a former Queens Library employee working there who will act as a connector. The staff of South Hollis would like to establish an open house in the evenings where families can learn more about the library and the ways that they can partner with them. While children actively borrow books, Vicks would like to increase teen and adult borrowing.

Of course, South Hollis still has the issues that many urban libraries have, needing more funding for computers and to increase materials in circulation, a more inviting Children’s Room, and another renovation or space expansion.

“The library’s administration is doing their job, and we’re down here doing ours. Life still goes on,” said Charlene Vicks.
Mastics-Moriches-Shirley Library
Response after Superstorm Sandy

By Kerri Rosalia

Library Background: The Mastics-Moriches-Shirley Community Library (MMSCL), founded in 1974 to serve the hamlets of Mastic, Mastic Beach, Shirley and Moriches, is located in Shirley, sixty-five miles east of New York City on Long Island’s south shore. The library is located on a peninsula within five miles of the Atlantic Ocean. Over the past thirty-six years, the library has grown from a 3,500 sq. ft. storefront serving a total population of 26,629 to a 45,000 sq. ft. facility serving approximately 56,000 residents through the work of more than 200 staff members.

Located in a shopping center, the library is a community destination with a location on two public bus routes and within one mile walking distance of four district schools and a Head Start center. One of the five largest out of fifty-four public libraries in the county, the library’s annual circulation exceeds 800,000 items per year and average building use is 1,000 patrons daily.

We serve a diverse population of library patrons who speak over twenty-seven languages at home. We may be best known for our literacy program LEFA, Learning English is a Family Affair. We offer over fifty literacy classes a week throughout the community.

The Aftermath of Superstorm Sandy

The photos on the next page cannot do justice to the horrific effects that Superstorm Sandy had on our community. It was a natural and environmental disaster for our area. Hundreds of homes were flooded, oil tanks were floating in the streets, and boats broke free from their moorings only to land on front lawns. The area was without power for weeks as a subsequent nor’easter made its way up the coast bringing snow and frigid temperatures. A significant number of residents did not have heat.

The National Guard was deployed to our town to assist in maintaining order and distributing some supplies. The response effort from the federal and state agencies was agonizingly slow. Residents needed food, shelter, clothing, and information to navigate after the storm. We had an organizational opportunity to rise to the top as contingent leaders, and we did.

Providing the Basics

We opened our facility for extended hours and provided heat, food, water, coffee and charging stations for residents and staff members who were impacted. Staff members volunteered to serve food and replenish supplies. Many baked items at home to share with customers. When it came time to close, customers were offered the opportunity to leave with provisions for the evening.

Kerri Rosalia is Director of the Mastics Moriches Shirley Community Library and can be reached at: mmscldirector@gmail.com.
Living Local History

- **Storytelling through capturing oral history**

Library staff played a vital role as listeners. Impacted residents arrived, stayed, and told stories of how the storm had impacted them. We were a sympathetic ear for many. Our librarians working on the local history collection recognized this as an opportunity to document history. Compelling tales were recorded for our collection.
Storytelling through photographs

We encouraged residents to bring us photographs of the storm's impact on our area and quickly added them to our local history files. In the days immediately after the storm, we installed large screen monitors throughout the library, looping the slide show of photos. As travel throughout the community was limited, those spending time at the library learned of the breadth and severity of the storm through these photos.

The editor of the local Tri-Hamlet News arrived with an oversized Apple monitor and workstation as she had no electricity at her home or business. She set up shop in the library and shared the pictures that she had with us for our local history collection.

Information and Referral

Taking on a traditional role, our staff immediately recognized that there was a need for consistent and accurate information for residents. In response we:

- Designed a web page to distribute information on shelters, food banks, FEMA locations, and more
- Integrated the webpage into the library app
- Created a Facebook page
- Started a Twitter feed and tapped into the FEMA feeds on our website
- Updated our Library Link database to include disaster resources

These content repositories became the official go-to sites for those who needed help and those who wanted to volunteer and donate to help storm victims. The library also added capacity to local organizations who were not digitally savvy. As an example, we assisted a local 501(c)(3) organization in setting up a PayPal account to accept financial donations for assistance to victims.

Outreach Opportunity to Vulnerable Populations

As the library already had a vibrant ESOL, English for Speakers of Other Languages, program and strong ties to the ESOL population, we translated all the information into Spanish for our vulnerable Hispanic population. Many were living in the severely impacted areas and were not receiving information in their primary language. Bilingual flyers were generated and distributed throughout the community to those who did not have Internet access. We visited the bilingual mass, local restaurants and locations where new immigrants congregated to be sure they knew where they could receive assistance.

Adding Capacity to Community Relief Efforts

Local action was required to bring desperately needed supplies of clothing, food, and basic necessities to residents. A local Leaders Council that had been dormant was quickly mobilized by community leaders. That group reorganized and expanded as the Tri-Hamlet Hurricane Relief Committee. Although Sandy was later determined to be a Superstorm, the name remained unchanged. The library hosted the frequent meetings, and the library director served on the advisory board. Library staff worked overtime in the days and weeks following October 29th, 2012, in order to meet the needs of the group.
Capitalizing on Existing Resources

Prior efforts undertaken by library staff in creating a database of community resources proved invaluable. Emergency relief organizations and disaster recovery resources were added to our existing Library Link database to assist residents finding local assistance. The library had the opportunity to be the connection to information resources in a time of crisis. We were able to curate and filter through an overwhelming amount of information for our customers in a way that Google could not.

Getting a Place at the Table

As a result of our work in the aftermath of Superstorm Sandy, library director Kerri Rosalia was appointed by Governor Cuomo to serve as co-chair of the NY Rising Community Reconstruction Zone committee for Mastic Beach and Smith Point of Shirley. Together with a committee of community leaders, the CRZ team identified critical projects that could improve resiliency in the face of a future storm. Funding for first-mover projects is being released by New York State as projects across Long Island get underway. More information on the Mastic Beach and Smith Point of Shirley NY Rising CRZ program can be found at: http://stormrecovery.ny.gov/nyrcr/community/mastic-beach-and-smith-point-shirley

Partnering to Help Local Business

The Small Business Development Center at Stony Brook is one of 23 campus-based regional centers within New York State, which brings together the resources of Stony Brook University, the private sector and government at all levels to assist entrepreneurs, business and industry professionals in solving problems
leading to increased productivity and profitability. For eighteen months after the storm, the Mastics-Moriches-Shirley Community Library provided space for the Stony Brook Small Business Development Center (SBDC) at Stony Brook to help small business members in the community recover from Superstorm Sandy. SBDC dispersed of more than $1 million in storm recovery assistance grants, provided counseling and more.

Officials at the SBDC reported that through the joint venture, they helped more than fifty clients at the Mastics-Moriches-Shirley Library, providing regular business counseling and assistance in submitting applications for the New York Business Storm Recovery Grant. The $1 million in storm recovery assistance goes directly to assisting business owners with recovering lost working capital, repairing damaged structures and replenishing lost inventory. The SBDC also held two successful workshops, attracting fifty-three attendees, on starting a business, business continuity, and storm preparation.

The library was able to provide office space and in-kind services so that the Small Business Development Center was able to help many small businesses in our area.

Summary

In the weeks after Sandy, we learned how to serve our customers, as well as non-customers, in new and nontraditional ways. We had the capacity to deliver where other organizations in our area did not. Although we never saw ourselves as called to lead after a natural disaster, we stepped into a contingent leadership role to do just that. We now consider our role as a community center in the aftermath of a disaster as part of our strategic plan.

Leadership Response

• Convened community leaders to organize relief efforts
• Improved access to recovery information in multiple languages
• Provided information and referral services
• Obtained a leadership position in NY Rising Community Reconstruction Zone to help plan for a more resilient community
• Served our customers in unexpected ways
  □ Extended hours of operation
  □ Provided food and beverages
- Provided charging stations
- Reached out to vulnerable populations
- Provided a venue for “story-telling” and recorded the stories as they were happening for our local history archives
- Actively sought current photographs for our local history archives
- Partnered with the Small Business Development Corporation (SBDC) to aid impacted businesses

Conclusion

Reflecting on the events and the library response, we concluded that the disaster provided an opportunity for the library to rise to a leadership position in the community, and we were well-positioned to fill the role. Community organizations and leaders viewed us with appreciation as we mobilized quickly, added digital solutions, and worked in new and sometimes surprising ways to serve our residents. They recognized that our staff was trained and ready to provide digital services of value to area non-profits, businesses, and residents alike. The library filled a crucial gap in knowledge management and sharing of vital information. There was no other organization in our community better prepared to fill that role. Our staff was inspired to help, and our board of trustees gave us unprecedented independence to do whatever it took to make a difference. Without them we could not have succeeded. Although as a board and staff we hope we never have to fill that role again, we know we are uniquely qualified to do so if circumstances warrant.

We now consider our role as part of a larger disaster response network an integral part of our strategic plan. Libraries can make a significant impact on recovery efforts and resiliency planning in their communities.
Serving A Public Library Community After A Natural Disaster: Recovering From “Hurricane Sandy”

Maureen M. Garvey

Dedication: This case study is dedicated to the people of Bellmore, NY, and to the BML Board of Trustees whose leadership and cooperation allowed the BML staff to provide vital disaster recovery services.

Background: Superstorm Sandy was the second costliest hurricane in U.S. history and the largest Atlantic hurricane on record when it hit the south shore of Long Island, New York on October 29, 2012. Even though the news media had warned of the forthcoming storm, few people anticipated the magnitude of damage and destruction, the number of homes that would be without power, or the length of time those homes would be cold and dark.

On October 28, 2012 Nassau County Supervisor Ed Mangano declared a mandatory evacuation for all residents south of Sunrise Highway and west of the Town of Rockville Centre, and all towns and villages south of Merrick Road and east of Rockville Centre.

The Bellmore Memorial Library (BML) is located south of Sunrise Highway, but east of Rockville Center. However, much of the community it serves is located south of Merrick Road, thus in the mandatory evacuation area. Nassau County prepared for the storm by establishing emergency shelters in some centrally located high schools and colleges. The Long Island Rail Road (LIRR), schools and the airports declared closed on Sunday, October 28, and the Bellmore Memorial Library followed suit.

On Thursday, November 1, 2012, three days after Hurricane Sandy wreaked havoc on Long Island, the BML opened its doors to the public once again. The Library was one of the few buildings that had any electrical power. The BML’s electrical power was back days, in many cases weeks, earlier than most of the homes in Bellmore, and sooner than many of the nearby libraries.

It was clear from the moment the Library opened its doors that the residents of Bellmore were in shock and needed emotional support as well as practical assistance to recover from this traumatic event. BML suddenly found itself as a safe haven for Bellmore residents. The storm had transformed a community...

Maureen Garvey is Director of the Bellmore Memorial Library and can be reached at: mgarvey@bellmorelibrary.org.
based public library into a disaster recovery resource center for people of all ages, from all walks of life and from various surrounding towns.

Bellmore Memorial Library (BML)

The BML is a public library serving the intellectual, educational, and recreational needs of the residents of the Bellmore Union Free School District. The district encompasses most of the hamlet of Bellmore which has a population of about 16,000. The Library was founded in 1947 and is a not-for-profit organization. The BML, funded by local tax dollars, loans materials such as books and CDs, provides free wi-fi, computers for public use with high-speed internet access, offers book discussions, storytimes and programs for residents of all ages, quiet study rooms, online databases, downloadable audio and e-books, homebound services, reference and readers’ advisory and more; in short, everything most local public libraries offer to their patrons. BML staff bring books to the train station and to the local pool in the summer, and a "Little Free Library" outside the building provides books 24/7/365.

Bellmore is a 45-minute drive from New York City and many residents commute to the City. Bellmore transforms into a beach community each summer because of its proximity to Jones Beach and the Atlantic Ocean.

Introduction

What is the role of a community-based library when a disaster strikes the community it serves?” This was the question that our Board of Trustees and I, as the BML Director, asked ourselves as we struggled to assist the Bellmore community in the aftermath of Superstorm Sandy.

This Case Study will review why, how, and when certain crisis management decisions were made and what changes were initiated to the BML’s operations. Underlying the answers to the question is the principle that community-based libraries are the glue that binds many communities together, especially in times of disaster and crisis. This study will demonstrate the truth of the assumption.

The article will also address the needs of the BML community during this difficult period and is a testament to the value of community-based and supported public libraries. These institutions not only provide intellectual services to their communities but in times of natural or man-made disasters can and do provide an extremely valuable community resource for residents’ recovery.

Long Island and NYC have been through many hurricanes in the past but Sandy was exceptional. Hurricane Sandy was referred to in the media as a “Frankenstorm” partly because it was the result of several different weather factors, and partly because of its ferocity and the destruction it caused. In hindsight it is very hard to justify the complacency of residents the day before Sandy slammed into Long Island. However, even if everyone had taken the predictions seriously, there was really no way to prepare for this event adequately.
And so, despite the Nassau County Supervisor’s order, there were many people who did not evacuate. One library patron told me that, when she realized how bad the situation was, she and her husband tried to drive to Merrick Road to safety. While they were en route, their car started to fill up with water. They panicked, but luckily another person who hadn’t yet left saw them and came to their assistance, helping them out of their car. This BML patron had been afraid for her life. Luckily, no one on the south shore lost their lives, but property damage was immense. Many of our residents dealt with problems for months, and some are still dealing with the storm’s impact. This article, however, focuses on the first two weeks of November 2012, the immediate aftermath.

**A Personal Note**

One night, during that first week, my husband and I drove along Sunrise Highway, a major east-west road that runs through Nassau and Suffolk counties. We were looking for an open gas station; we did not find one. It was eerie. All electrical power was out -- no streetlights, no house lights, no traffic lights, no store lights: nothing but cold, and wet, and dark.

We were looking for gas so that we could get to our daughter’s wedding. I suspect that if my daughter’s wedding had not been the weekend after Hurricane Sandy hit I would have extended BML’s weekend hours that first weekend, but my personal problems were a distraction. My daughter’s apartment in Long Beach was destroyed, and so, like many others, we had unexpected house-guests and no power, in addition to the upcoming wedding. That said, in retrospect, it might have been too much for library staff that first weekend because staff were experiencing the same challenges as our patrons.

**BML Reopens on Thursday, November 1, 2012**

“LIBRARY CLOSED DUE TO STORM
TO FIND OUT IF THE LIBRARY IS OPEN,
PLEASE CALL 785-2990.
STAY SAFE!”

The above wording was on the signs we put on both doors of the Library before we closed on Saturday, October 27, 2012. The Library was closed on Sunday, October 28, the day before Hurricane Sandy hit Long Island, and on Monday, the 29th and Tuesday, the 30th. BML did not regain power until sometime on October 31. As soon as I learned we had power back, I contacted staff to let them know that we would open on November 1st. We did not know at the time that some residents would not have power back for weeks. We were also unaware of the extent of the damage to homes and to nearby libraries.

BML opened at 10 am on November 1, 2012. One of the librarians that was situated at the BML main entrance when we opened our doors told me she could “feel the love” of the patrons as they came in. They could be warm, they had found light and power; they had found safe-harbor.

The first thing that the residents requested was an electrical outlet. Once their phones were charging, many people wanted to talk to others “in the same boat” and compare hurricane stories. During the following days, the BML facility would constantly have a full house, with people sitting on the floor when there was no more available seating.
The BML Board of Trustees and I were proud to see the Library used as a center for community service and disaster relief meeting its community commitment to the people (taxpayers) of Bellmore. It felt wonderful to be able to help our neighbors in a time of crisis and confusion.

Meeting Community Disaster Needs

The community told us what they needed and that was one of the most important lessons we learned during this crisis. It didn’t matter what services the Library wanted to provide, what mattered was what services the residents needed, and we tried to be receptive and open to their recommendations.

The following is a brief description of some of the services BML provided during the Sandy Recovery:

**Charging Cell Phones:** Many people were most interested in charging their cell phones, not having been able to do so for, in many cases, days. It was not uncommon for people to use their car batteries to charge their cell phones, depleting gas they would not be able to replace and draining car batteries. (Gas stations had gas, but were unable to pump it-no power. When the power returned, the pumps were quickly depleted). Several power strips were purchased so that every outlet in the building became a mini charging station.

**Extending Library Hours:** On Thursday, November 1st the Library only stayed open from 10 to 5. On Friday, we resumed our regular hours which on Fridays are 9:30-5:30. Saturday and Sunday we also opened regular hours. By the following Friday, November 9, it was clear that we needed to stay open more hours. I spoke to the President of the Library’s Board of Trustees, Emily Schreiber. She was in complete agreement and conferred with her fellow Board members. All the trustees, Emily, Robert Botwin, Karolyn Hertzberg, Roberta Newman and Wendy Forgash, were fully supportive of the Library serving the community in whatever way possible. Instead of closing at 5:30, we stayed open until 9PM. We stayed open until 9PM Saturday, and opened 1-9 on Sunday, November 11 and regular hours of 9:30-9 on Monday. BML had been scheduled to be closed on Sunday and Monday in observance of Veteran’s Day. I asked for volunteers to work additional hours, and had no problem staffing, another example of Library staff rising to the occasion.

Going strictly by anecdotal evidence, we were, at this point, serving an unusual number of non-residents, in addition to an unusual number of our own patrons.

**Designated a Warming Center:** We found out at some point that we had been designated a Warming Center by the Nassau County Supervisor, but we were not advised of this fact. This is the kind of thing that happens, I think, when a major emergency occurs. Needless to say, we were perfectly happy to serve as a Warming Center.

**Staff Commitment:** BML staff rose to the occasion and kept things going. Like so many others, many members of the staff had no power at their homes, but were committed to assisting the Bellmore community in its disaster recovery.

BML staff is hardworking and welcoming in the extreme, and their “soft” skills helped all the patrons who walked through our doors during those very stressful early days.
BML After Sandy – A Library With A Heart

Walking around the Bellmore Memorial Library for those two weeks immediately after Sandy was very interesting. Every seat was taken, every power strip used. We set up tables in our Community Room for people to work on their laptops and i-pads.

When closing time came, I would walk around the building to inform people personally, rather than relying on an intercom announcement. I remember one gentleman saying to me at 9PM on a Sunday night “I have never set foot in this library until now, and now I have to leave!” It was very hard to send people home to cold, dark houses, but BML staff had to take care of their own damaged homes as well.

Within a week after the storm struck we were putting up pots of coffee and urns of hot water for tea and hot chocolate, and had cookies out at all times. Patrons came with sandwiches for those who were still without power. We showed movies in the children’s room. One mother came with her children and stayed all day every day for over a week. There was no doubt that we were filling an essential need for our residents.

Most striking was the comfort that people gave to one another. Just the ability to come in and talk to other people who were going through the same thing was very important to those who were dislocated due to the storm.

It was fascinating to hear remarks like “Well, we didn’t do too badly, we only lost power for a week”. Relatively speaking, that was, in this situation, very good fortune. After the first wave of residents that came to charge phones or get out of the cold, dark house, we started to see people who needed to use the copiers and FAX machine to submit claims to their insurance companies. For several months, under the Board’s direction, we did not charge for faxes or copies related to Sandy.

Patrons were consulting the reference desk for assistance finding workmen to start fixing their homes. Many residents had questions about flood insurance and state disaster aid. These types of reference questions kept our staff very busy for many months.

Project Hope

Project Hope was an initiative of South Nassau Hospital, funded by FEMA, to provide crisis counseling assistance and training for residents experiencing emotional distress from Superstorm Sandy.

BML had a “kick-off” event, and created space in our public information section clearly identified as Project Hope materials. Additionally, BML put aside a room for weekly support groups. Project Hope counselors “set up shop” in the Library, holding regular counseling sessions over a period of more than a year.

During these sessions the counselors assisted Sandy victims not only with emotional problems, but provided practical referrals as well. As a show of appreciation, when Project Hope’s grant period expired, the BML was presented with a quilt and their

The moment I knew things were different... It was 9:30 and I was with my brother and Dad. My Mom was at work and then the storm started. On my mom had closed and my dad had to get my mom. So the race broke down and they walked and almost died.

Project Hope
thanks for working with them. This was one of those “win-win” situations, since we wanted to do anything we could to help BML patrons.

**BML Financial Disaster Recovery Costs**

During the entire Hurricane Sandy crisis, the BML Board of Trustees was incredibly supportive. The Trustees supported my request for extended hours, agreeing that this was an essential service. Although not budgeted, we all agreed services must be provided to our community.

The staff cost of staying open those extra hours was close to $8,500.00. It did not occur to us that we might be reimbursed by any agency for the cost. However, in January of 2013, FEMA offered a workshop on “Improving Critical Facility Safety from Flooding and High Winds”, and, because of the damage to our glass wall, I decided it might be useful for me to attend. The glass wall, built in the late sixties, had been pushed in by Sandy’s high winds, and had to be completely replaced.

It was at that workshop that I learned that the Library could be reimbursed for any money that was spent as a result of Sandy, from FEMA through the NYS Division of Homeland Security and Emergency Services, State Office of Emergency Management. We worked closely with FEMA, completed all the required paperwork, and in June of 2013 the Library received reimbursement for 90% of the labor costs incurred due to the extra hours. Recent communication indicates that BML may yet be reimbursed for the remaining 10%.

**Unexpected Side Effects: Story Corps at BML**

In 2014 one of my librarians told me she wanted to apply for a grant from Story Corps, through the American Library Association. She completed the grant paperwork, and the Bellmore Memorial Library was one of ten libraries nationwide to receive it.

The grant gave us training and equipment from StoryCorps so that we could record oral histories of Bellmore residents. We felt strongly that one reason we received the grant was the interest in stories about Sandy, and we have been able to record many. We did programming about Sandy, including premiering an independent documentary about Sandy and its aftermath in Lindenhurst, which was shown in the Long Island Independent Film Festival held at the Bellmore Theater. The StoryCorps experience has been wonderful, and has enabled us to reach out into the community and create a more complete record of Sandy.

**Planning for the Future**

After most people were back to normal, I thought about the fact that, if I could have staffed minimally, I would have liked to have stayed open even later. The Library had a compact storage room that was no longer needed, which I’d often thought about converting to a public space.

It seemed to me that if we could limit access to the rest of the building, this space could give us the ability to extend our hours in the case of another emergency. To that end, I wrote to our State Senator, asking if there were funds available for such a conversion, but I was turned down. However, this year we are converting that space to a meeting room that will have many outlets and data lines. We are applying
for a NYS Construction Grant for this project. If, heaven forbid, another Sandy hits, the room should be a great help.

CONCLUSION

The fact is that there are still people who are not yet back in their homes. But most are, and Sandy is, hopefully, an event not to be repeated any time soon.

I learned some important lessons, which I hope I never have to use. The first is to have a plan in place if the worst happens. No one can afford to waste time and resources preparing for something that is unlikely to happen. But if it seems likely that an extreme weather event is on its way, think about what you will do.

The second thing I learned is to be flexible and deal with the reality of the situation, as well as to take advantage of whatever positive factors come your way. If we had not been one of the first libraries to regain power, our patrons might have gone elsewhere. But I am sure that whenever we did regain power, we would have been utilized—the need was just so great.

Finally, it is clear to me that no matter how much you prepare, you cannot prepare for every eventuality. In my more than 25 years working in public libraries I have been through floods and fires, bomb scares and more. I have written safety manuals and attended workshops on responding to active shooters. None of that prepared me for this experience because each emergency is unique. But if you and your Trustees and your staff can work together, you can help your community get through a disaster or crisis. That is the answer to the question I posed at the beginning of this paper. And that is very satisfying work.
Sample Letters and Newspaper Article

Bellmore, N.Y. 11710
Nov. 28, 2012

Ms. Maureen Garvey, Director
Bellmore Memorial Library
Bedford Ave
Bellmore, N.Y.

Dear Ms. Garvey,

We wish to express our thanks to you & your staff for helping us in the aftermath of superstorm “Sandy.”

The library was “our home away from home” during that time & was supportive in every way.

Have a wonderful Christmas holiday!

Yours truly,

[Handwritten Signature]

Serving A Public Library Community After A Natural Disaster
Dear Ms. Garvey,

I want to take this opportunity to thank you, the wonderful and gracious members of your library staff and the members of the library board for the courteous reception we received during the power outage caused by our friend, Hurricane Sandy and her Nor’Easter buddy.

The staff of the library was welcoming and considerate of the difficulties the citizens of Bellmore were facing. We are aware that members of the staff were also facing these difficulties but managed to find a way to be there for us. All questions were answered, most requests were met and especially the request to lengthen the hours to be open on the weekend of the storm. The difference between the closing time of five o’clock and nine o’clock was both physically and emotionally important to all of us. At least a dozen of my close friends actively took shelter at the library almost every day until our power returned.

The availability of cookies, tea, coffee, fruits added to the comfort of those of who spent time at the library. But these were only secondary to the sense of being welcomed by a wonderful and caring staff.

We express our sincere appreciation for what you did for us during these trying times. You have defined the concept of community in the best manner possible by your actions.

Sincerely and Respectfully,

Felix and Ruthe Berman
November 15, 2012
Community Events

Community dinner at Kennedy. John F. Kennedy High School, at 3000 South Belmont Ave., will host a "community get-together" in the wake of Hurricane Sandy on Thursday, Nov. 15, at 6 p.m. Free dinner, drinks and dessert will be provided. The school's student body, faculty and staff invite all members of the Belmont-Merrick community to attend the event and enjoy an evening in the company of neighbors and friends as the community recovers following the hurricane. Residents are encouraged to attend whether they need a hot meal, a night out and/or if they're feeling overwhelmed by the events of recent weeks. Any resident interested in making a food donation should call (516) 992-1405 or 392-1454.

Kennedy PTA discount cards. The Kennedy High School PTA is offering discount cards with money-saving opportunities at neighborhood merchants. The cards cost $10 each, with all proceeds going to scholarships for the graduating class. Many local establishments are participating, with each offering various discounts. Examples include 10 percent off purchases at Donuts on Merrick Road in Merrick and Belmont, and 20 percent off Accentor in Merrick, among many more discounts in both Merrick and Belmont.

Recharging at the library. Three days after Hurricane Sandy wreaked havoc on Long Island, people of all ages, from all walks of life and from various surrounding towns sought shelter at the Belmont Memorial Library. One of the first libraries in the area to reopen after the storm, the staff was pleased to welcome the hundreds of people who came into the library to get warm, charge their phones and laptops, check their emails and to share their stories with one another.
How the Westbury Library Helped the Community after Hurricane Sandy

Cathleen A. Merenda

Westbury is a suburban community centrally located in Nassau County, New York, twenty-five miles from New York City. The Library serves approximately 35,000 residents in the Long Island communities of Westbury, New Cassel, Old Westbury, and Carle Place.

Although Westbury is not on the shore like some areas of Long Island, and so did not suffer from flooding, the areas served by the Library were hit hard by Hurricane Sandy. Most people lost electricity for at least a few days and many families did not have electricity and heat for two weeks. The event, with extreme winds and torrential rain that brought down an enormous amount of trees, was followed by a day of heavy, wet snow leading to flooded streets and caused additional tree limbs and power lines to come down. The Long Island Railroad did not run all week, there was a gas shortage, and most people could not get to work or school during the week after the storm.

The unusual severity of the Hurricane, the loss of electricity, heat, access to cell phones and the Internet, and the distressing reports of deaths from the storm, created a great deal of anxiety and physical discomfort. Those who had access to the news heard that there were multiple fatalities in the region including people that had drowned because they chose not to leave their homes by the shore. For most of the people of Long Island and New York City who do not usually experience hurricanes, this was a new and frightful experience.

In this unsettled atmosphere the Westbury Memorial Public Library staff came together to find ways to help the community. An agile and responsive staff made the Library a place of safety, connection, and comfort after the storm.

The Disaster Recovery Plan was used to prepare the Library for the Hurricane. The tech staff moved all electronic equipment away from the windows and into safe and dry storage. Equipment was powered down and unplugged. All essential backup hard drives were boxed up and taken from the building in case of fire or water damage. The staff updated the Facebook page and the Library website to let the community know the Library would be closed due to weather.

All essential backup hard drives were boxed up and taken from the building in case of fire or water damage.

Cathleen Merenda is Director of the Westbury Memorial Public Library and can be reached at: <cathleentowey@westburylibrary.org>
The Hurricane hit on Monday, October 29 and the Library did not get electricity back until Friday, November 2. The assistant director, Colleen McCrea, drove over each day to see if there was electricity so the Library could open. When the fire alarm went off, staff were alerted that the electricity was on. Until that time, communication was difficult as land lines were not working and cell reception was terrible. The first day the Library could open was on Saturday, November 3; the entire full-time staff reported to work to get the Library up and running.

As soon as the staff arrived at work on reopening day I held a stand up meeting to triage the situation and discuss what needed to be done immediately. Our Library staff is always flexible and responsive and this attitude was on display as they physically transformed the Library to serve the needs of the users now coming through the doors.

As soon as the Library opened local residents began to arrive. Because road conditions were bad and a gas shortage made it difficult to travel, people needed to find a local place to warm up. Because the Library is in walking distance to most of the community, access to the Library was greatly facilitated.

Regular Library hours were extended to accommodate the community, especially helpful for patrons who didn’t have heat. On Saturday, November 3, the first day back in service, the Library opened at 9 am and stayed open until 10 pm, five hours past the normal 5 pm Saturday closing. On Sunday, when the Library typically opens from 1 pm-5 pm, the library was opened from 10 am-6 pm. An accommodating staff worked the extra hours to assist, receiving extra overtime pay on Sunday. On Monday the Library returned to its usual hours of 10 am-9 pm.

The Library website was updated immediately to let patrons know that the Library was open with power, heat, Internet and Wi-Fi. A message was sent out via our announcement list. Within minutes patrons began arriving at the Library and told staff they had received an e-mail about the opening. While many did not have Internet at home, they were able to read their e-mails via their smartphones.

Close to 150 people per hour came to the Library the first day it reopened. Our friendly staff was welcoming and talked to almost everyone who came in about their experiences, offering sympathy and attention. Staff themselves were struggling with their own problems. One staff member’s car was destroyed by a falling tree, and many others were without electricity and heat at their homes. It was clear that the Hurricane had been traumatic for everyone.

For the next eight days the Library was very busy. In the afternoons there were ninety or more patrons in the building. At any time there were thirty–forty users on Wi-Fi and there was huge stress on the network. With the 30 Md/s Cablevision line, occasionally the network slowed to a crawl due to patrons watching Netflix or Hulu on their laptops.

Everyone needed to charge their cell phones so staff put out extra power strips around the Library for charging. Tech staff set up an expanded, temporary technology center in the meeting room using our laptops so the public would have internet access. We streamed News 12, the local Long Island news station, on a screen in the meeting room so people could see what was going on in the outside world. Staff put out lots of extra chairs in the meeting room for people to watch TV or relax.

To increase seating for long periods of time around the rest of the Library, staff quickly set up all our comfortable, flexible chairs that are usually used in the teen zone, the Library’s after school program. For seating, we set up whatever was available wherever there was space, often clustering seats around power strips for charging devices.

During this time many first time visitors came to the Library. Whole families came for the day to keep warm after having spent days at home with no heat. One family with four boys camped out in a section of comfortable seating and spent their time reading and playing video games.

Our librarians assisted patrons from other libraries on the south shore of Long Island, near the water. Their libraries were so devastated by the Hurricane that many were closed for months.
As many people stayed for most of the day for warmth, there was a lot of talking on cell phones, not something we usually encourage, but fine under the circumstances. Library visitors napped, knitted, playing solitaire, video games, talked and read. People ran into their neighbors and had a chance to compare storm stories. The atmosphere was homey, relaxed and friendly. It was very crowded but there was a great sense of community as we were all in this tough time together.

The days after Hurricane Sandy were an opportunity to show case the Library to residents as a refuge to turn to when they were in need. The Library seized an opportunity to take a leadership role in the community by remaining open for extra hours and serving as a safe haven. The staff personally connected with patrons and strengthened bonds with old and new users. And the Library simply made things feel normal during a very abnormal time.

The Westbury Times, our local newspaper, later featured a story on the Library’s efforts during the aftermath of Hurricane Sandy. In the days following Sandy, Library visitors repeatedly expressed their gratitude and admiration to the staff for their help and support. I never had so many people say “thank you”, and the positive comments made all of the Westbury Library staff feel great.
Every day that a library opens its doors, it provides a public service – introducing a preschooler to the joy of books at story times, helping a school-age child find the resources he or she needs for a homework assignment, assisting someone out-of-work with a job search, lending the latest best seller to an avid reader, or locating the most recent medical information for someone with a newly diagnosed disease.

From October 28 through November 3, 2012, in the aftermath of Super Storm Sandy, Mahopac Public Library also provided things we normally take for granted - light, heat, and water. With most of the Library's service area without electrical power, it became a place of refuge, a place where people came to stay warm, to access the Internet, to charge their laptops, tablets, and cell phones, to charge an oxygen machine, to work remotely [including members of our IT service company] or to study, pay bills, contact insurance companies, and to keep family and friends updated and connected with others in the community. People also borrowed books, read newspapers and magazines, and entertained their children while the schools were closed, but during this time nothing was taken for granted, not even Halloween. On October 31st, we salvaged a canceled Halloween with movies and candy for the children.

Several factors enabled us to provide not only our "traditional" library services but also those very basic amenities. First and foremost, we had power; the Library fell inside an area that never lost it. Second, the Library is located on a major thoroughfare; there were no downed trees or wires that prevented vehicular traffic. And third, our IT service company had just finished replacing the Library’s two working wireless access points with fifteen, increasing both speed and capacity.

We broke our share of records. Although we curtailed our hours of operation that week - from 65 hours to 49 hours - we were inundated with visitors. On a typical 11.5 hour day, about 700 people will visit the Library. During our first 7.5 hour day after the storm, more than 1,200 people came to the Library and, at the end of the week, there was a total of 6,108 visits. Our 31 public access computers were occupied at all times. Several people brought in their power strips, allowing perfect strangers to plug into electrical outlets scattered throughout the Library's open spaces, meeting rooms, and hallways. Our on-site technician observed, "Just as moths are drawn to flames, people with laptops are drawn to outlets." As people logged on to the Internet, the IT service company told us that IP address use went from 150 to 1,000.

As one of our regular users noted, "There were many cranky people visiting and I saw nothing but extreme helpfulness and cheer from the staff." Based upon the thank you notes we received [see the photograph below], the hospitality that we extended to all those who walked through our doors was

Patricia Kaufman retired as Director of the Mahopac Public Library and can be reached at: mbkaufman7@gmail.com
much appreciated. However, we were not unique in our efforts. Libraries have always stepped up to the plate and now it is even official. Since 2010, FEMA, per Federal Legislation, has classified public libraries as essential services, “along with police, fire protection, emergency services, utilities, medical services, and education.” And we always thought we were just doing our jobs, using our skill sets and training to make things better because we care about the communities we serve.

From the November 6, 2012 Mid-Hudson Library System Bulletin:

The Mahopac Library saw over 1,200 people come through their doors in just five hours last Wednesday, including someone who needed to charge their oxygen machine! Talk about life saving! “Thank you to Mahopac Public Library for being a port in the storm for thousands of local residents after Hurricane Sandy,” said Mahopac Trustee and Putnam County Library Association President Alice Walsh in a letter to the editor, “What a lifesaver the Library was for our community. We are grateful to the staff of the Library, who worked tirelessly to provide a safe and cheerful environment.”


Thank you to the Town and County for funding Mahopac Public Library, and to the voters! The library has been a lifesaver!
Transitioning from an urban library to a rural library was not as difficult as I expected it to be. The reality is they are strikingly similar in many ways. Our big busy cities and small sleepy towns have many of the same social and economic challenges. Sometimes the challenges are just masked by quieter nights and a willingness to pretend that such things don’t happen. One surprise was that the digital divide and digital illiteracy, something I had seen as a crux of my professional work, were just as bad, if not worse, in the small community of Pawling, New York.

When I took the job of director at the Pawling Library, I was told that my biggest challenge would be funding and convincing a large segment of the population that not only was the library still relevant, but that it needed to grow and modernize. The board was extremely supportive board, however community leaders viewed the library as an unnecessary expense on the tax bill. This was demonstrated when a future vote was squashed in infancy after the town supervisor darkened our door at a trustee meeting to let us know that he would publically come out against the vote. I realized quickly that advocacy and a healthy chunk of PR was necessary for this organization.

My early days were spent attending public events and working to showcase the talented work the library staff had been doing for years. This good work was appreciated by an enthusiastic library following, but unknown to a good chunk of the tax-paying community. Our PR efforts gained some traction. However, the narrative always fell back to books and children’s programs. These are two items that did make for good PR, but sadly didn’t establish the library as a necessary service that everyone should support with their tax dollars.

Then Gaia wielded her power and unexpectedly provided one of the strongest advocacy opportunities of my career. I didn’t realize it right away, but the one-two-three punch of ferocious storms vividly showed the community just how vital their public library is, especially in times of crisis. It took me literally stepping over members of the community, who I had never seen before but was now on a first-name basis with, as they spent days camped out on the library floor plugged into our electricity and internet connections.

Pawling was hit by two hurricanes and one major snow storm. These overwhelming weather events not only took out power and cable service, but trains and cell service were also down in our small Dutchess County community, stranding people in their homes without vital services. The third and final storm, Hurricane Sandy, brought the community to its knees and praise to the library staff and organization.

---

*Scott Jarzombek* was Director of the Pawling Library from 2011 to 2013 and is currently Executive Director of the Albany Public Library. He can be reached at jarzombeks@albanypubliclibrary.org
Right away, the library had a few things going for it. The main building, and its annex, were on a section of the grid that rarely, if ever, lost power. The library had a free T1 line provided to us via an agreement between the town and a local internet provider. When the library switched to a stronger cable connection to improve speed, the T1 line was retained as a backup—a choice that would prove to be a brilliant decision made by the library’s tech guy.

The impact of Hurricane Sandy was so great that residents were without power and heat for days, and even weeks. Many Pawling residents were commuters who could not get to work because train service was limited. Other residents worked from home, which was almost impossible to do without an internet connection. It didn’t take long for our little library to be overrun with people who needed a warm place to go and a way to communicate with the outside world.

The library’s response was perfect. With the support of the board and staff, hours were temporarily expanded hours and the annex was opened to the public so people could use our computers, electricity, and internet connection. The library also became a community hub for information. Staff kept everyone up to date on local news and what roads were open and closed. Neighbors met each other for the first time, and established new relationships. The feeling of community was strong within our walls, and several first-time patrons became regulars.

I had a new story to tell about our library. An article published in “Pawling Matters,” the local Chamber of Commerce’s monthly newsletter, which also served as the town’s main news outlet, wrote an incredibly kind article about the library’s role during those storms. Several members of the community were quoted saying how crucial the library was in a time of need for the community. We saw an increase in donations and I found myself defending the library’s right to exist less frequently when visiting the local pizza place and deli.

I look back at my time at Pawling with a lot of pride. Not just for what we did for the community during these extreme events, but because we were doing this work every day. The storms just increased the volume.

The library has become increasingly more relevant in our digital age. We are the safety net that provides access for everyone when they need it the most. Sometimes we just have to seize the moment and remind everyone.
Community Afloat: A Ship’s Library, a Place of Refuge

By Constantia Constantinou and Shafeek Fazal

Abstract: The paper Community Afloat: A Ship’s Library, a Place of Refuge tells the story of the Ship’s library of SUNY Maritime College that became a place of refuge for emergency personnel during three of the most devastating disasters in the recent history of the United States: the attacks of September 11th, Hurricane Katrina and Super Storm Sandy. The paper describes the efforts of the SUNY Maritime Librarians in mobilizing the Ship’s Library aboard the College’s Training Ship Empire State VI to become a place of support, hope, rest and refuge for emergency government employees. The Ship’s library, the library collections, facilities and librarians transformed their roles and repurposed the library’s resources in support of emergency personnel, social workers, FEMA workers and Surge volunteers during the long months that unfold the devastating events of the attacks of September 11th, Hurricane Katrina and Super Storm Sandy.

Literature review

Libraries have a long-standing tradition on ships for practical, psychological, as well as for educational purpose. Sailors found refuge in their small libraries in order to deal with loneliness at sea. Loneliness at sea is a condition, which has been described, in the medical science as “nostalgia,” in poetry and literary works as well as in paintings and art, Simpson & Weiner [1]. In eighteen and nineteenth-century iconography sailors were shown with a book in their hand. The book played an important part in the recreation and pastime of a sailor at sea. Reading helped dispel the loneliness and boredom of hard times at sea and provided of the few intellectual pastimes available on shipboard, Skallerup [2].

The desire to read and especially to learn at sea is evident in various accounts. Ships carried books for beginners such as books on learning to spell, grammar and arithmetic books, Dana [3]. The bible and other religious texts were among the most frequent reading materials. Frequently sailors read aloud to their shipmates so that others may learn to read. Popular literature of the day found its way aboard ships in the sea chests of sailors. In addition to religious books there were ephemeral literature of the street, which consisted of lurid and sensational stories, political pamphlets and books of amusement, Skallerup [4]. Medical books were written for masters of merchant vessels who needed information and advice on how to treat sickness and injury among their men. The Sailor’s Physician by Dr. Usher Parson was an early American works that was found on ships between 1824 and 1867, Skallerup [5].
It is not unusual to consider ship’s libraries as a place of refuge under different stressful conditions and circumstances. Libraries by nature and function always provided a sense of safety, comfort, and escape from reality through reading. Literature from the 18th century and 19th century demonstrates that the book and the library played an important role in the recreation and pastime of sailors at sea in battling with depression and loneliness. A century later, the role of the library and human psychology as it relates to the books, reading, and libraries providing a sense of safety, comfort, and escape remain the same.

During World War II, people felt that the principles and values of the western civilization were put to test. Molly Manning in her book, “When Books Went to War” [6] describes the government’s efforts in bolstering morale by distributing books. The Council on Books in Wartime pioneered a new innovation: the pocket-sized Army Services Editions (ASE) for greater distribution of books to the military. The ASE books provided both escape and catharsis for the soldiers. Throughout World War II, the Council on Books promoted a wide range of titles and genres. The opportunity to read during troubled times turned many service members into lifelong readers. The ASE program also helped to popularize many of the books we consider to be classics today, including “The Great Gatsby” and “A Tree Grows in Brooklyn,” as well as making paperbacks a viable part of the postwar book trade.

During World War II the merchant marine fleet also played an important role supporting the reading program of the Council on Books during World War II. The American Library Association, mobilized its efforts by shipping books to military personnel in the European theater. One of the most notable examples of the partnership between the American Library Association and the merchant marine fleet is the SS ALA. A ship from the American Diamond Lines was named ALA, after the acronym of the American Library Association. It regularly carried books to military personnel in Europe, until the day it was sunk, in October 9, 1942 while sailing off the Cape of Good Hope. It was torpedoed by a U-68 with the loss of five lives and a cargo of books [7].
SUNY Maritime College

SUNY Maritime College is one of the 64 colleges and universities of the State University of New York system. A four-year college located at the historic Fort Schuyler in Throggs Neck, New York, offers a solid academic program coupled with a structured cadet life in the regiment for both men and women. Maritime College prepares students for careers through a content-centered curriculum and a hands-on, team building approach to learning. As part of the maritime curriculum, SUNY Maritime students are required to sail onboard the Training Ship Empire State VI for 280 days during their undergraduate studies. Time at sea is part of students’ coursework and license training. The training ship provides the seagoing experience with instructors, faculty, ship personnel and crew.

SUNY Maritime College: Training Ship Empire State VI

During the summer months, the Training Ship Empire State VI is activated for a 90-day training voyage. Students in the Regiment of Cadets operate the vessel for a Summer Sea Term as part of their training requirements. The vessel's voyage includes domestic and European ports of call before returning to New York. Empire State VI is currently under the command of SUNY Maritime College alumnus Captain Richard S. Smith who is also the Commandant of Cadets at the Maritime College. With twenty-five years of service to the Maritime College, the ship holds the record as the longest serving power-driven vessel ever used by the school. She is expected to remain in use through at least 2020.

The Ship, originally designed as a troopship, was later converted to be a training ship. It is 565 feet long, has a displacement of 17,273 tons, and it travels at a high speed of 22 knots (25 mph). It complements sleeping arrangements for 791 people and it takes 10 days to activate.

SUNY Maritime College Libraries: Stephen B. Luce Library

In support of the academic curriculum, the SUNY Maritime College Library serves a dual role in two unique physical locations. The Stephen B. Luce Library, “Library Ashore“ resides in the historic Fort Schuyler and supports the students’ academic work for nine months of the year. The library’s holdings of print books contain over 80,000 volumes with special strength in marine engineering, maritime history, naval
architecture, marine transportation, oceanography, transportation economics, and management. In addition, the library has access to electronic books and electronic databases to support the academic program.

Ship’s Library
The Ship’s Library aboard the Training Ship Empire State VI, “Library Afloat”, supports the academic curriculum and the information needs of the shipboard community, students, faculty and crew for three summer months at sea.

The Ship’s Library occupies 2,400 square feet on deck four of the Training Ship Empire State VI. With a seating capacity for 50 people, the reading room area consists of group study tables, charts & maps tables and lounge chairs. The computer area has several networked workstations. The Librarian’s station includes a desk with a computer workstation and a network server, audio/visual equipment wired throughout the ship to deliver training and entertainment videos, and a ready reference area with over 200 reference books. The collection, consisting of print, media and electronic titles, is geared towards supporting classroom instruction, leisure reading, and entertainment that includes adult paperback fiction and non-fiction books.

Ship’s Library is also equipped with the appropriate technology to accommodate access to Internet and connections to the Ship’s satellite communication system. All library computers provide access to electronic resources and email.

The Empire State VI and Humanitarian Relief
In 1986 the Maritime Administration (MARAD) unit, of the Federal Government delivered the Empire State VI to the State University of New York, Maritime College to be used as a training ship for students pursuing careers as professional mariners. Under this arrangement, MARAD reserves the right to recall the Empire State VI to active duty whenever necessary.

The first time that the Empire State VI was activated by the United States Government was in 1994. It was activated in order to support the withdrawal of American troops from Mogadishu, Somalia. In 2001, during the attacks of 9/11 the Ship was activated to house emergency workers, and relief workers from all over the United States who worked at the World Trade Center site. During the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina in 2005, the Empire State VI sailed to New Orleans to be used for housing and support for port workers and
Library, A Place of Refuge: Ship’s Library in Response to Humanitarian Relief

The tragic events of the terrorist attacks of 9/11, and the devastation of hurricane Katrina and Super Storm Sandy, introduced a new dimension in the mission of the Ship’s Library aboard the Training Ship Empire State VI. From a library in support of the students’ academic studies, the Ship’s Library aboard the Training Ship Empire State VI was transformed overnight into a place of refuge, recovery and hope. Like so many examples in history, where books and libraries sustained the human spirit in war and times of sadness and sorrow, the Ship’s Library aboard the Empire State VI lived up to its promise. Librarians and collections helping people come to terms with the horror of the disasters, the human tragedy, the loneliness of their own emotions and the trauma of their daily experiences.

Attacks of 9/11

During the aftermath of the attacks of 9/11, New Yorkers and the American people experienced a strong gravitational pull to the values and principles of freedom that often we take for granted during times of peace. The American people defended the spirit of freedom and the ideals of intellectual freedom by demonstrating their support to their fellow citizens during the recovery efforts.

In 2001, during the attacks of 9/11, the Training Ship Empire State VI was deployed to New York City to assist as a floating hospital because of its capacity to accommodate up to 700 beds and a fully furnished sick bay. Very quickly it was realized that there were not many wounded, tragically, the 9/11 attacks casualties were fatal. The Ship was then repurposed to house emergency workers, and relief workers from all over the United States. People from many parts of the United States came to New York City to volunteer their services as medical personnel, social workers and construction workers who were assigned at the World Trade Center site. The Ship’s Library and its collections were made available for anyone who was staying aboard. The enormous shock of the 9/11 events, and the maximum-security measures implemented by the United States Government with anything relating to the recovery and investigation efforts around the World Trade Center site, made it very difficult to observe and collect more information relating to the Ship’s Library during the recovery efforts.

Hurricane Katrina, 2005

In 2005, Hurricane Katrina became one of the five deadliest hurricanes in the history of the United States. The storm is currently ranked as the third most intense United States land falling tropical cyclone, behind only the 1935 Labor Day hurricane and Hurricane Camille in 1969. Overall, at least 1,833 people died in the hurricane and subsequent floods, making it the deadliest United States hurricane since the 1928 Okeechobee hurricane. The total property damage was estimated at $108 billion (2005 USD), it was roughly four times the damage wrought by Hurricane Andrew in 1992.

After Hurricane Katrina ravaged the Gulf Coast, the Empire State VI was one of 10 ships activated for service by Transportation Secretary Norman Y. Mineta and dispatched to the region in September, 2005. Students, faculty and librarians at SUNY Maritime were not allowed to go to New Orleans because of the dangerous conditions and also because the semester was just getting under way. But several alumni and college staff members took part in the mission off and on.
For six months, the *Empire State VI* provided housing and meals for workers repairing a damaged oil refinery near Belle Chasse, La., and for harbor police and longshoremen at the Seventh Street Wharf in New Orleans. The ship's crew served 145,000 meals and sheltered roughly 400 people a day. Although the librarians did not go to New Orleans with the *Empire State VI*, the library collections and the library facility was prepared to respond to the devastating situation and serve its humanitarian purpose. The Library aboard the *Empire State VI* became a place of rest and refuge for the next six months. The collections, approximately 3,000 books (hard and soft cover) were made available to anyone visiting the Library deck. People were allowed to borrow books, films, magazines and newspapers. They would read them during their own time of rest, and return them to the library at the end of the week. A collection of 500 movies on DVD and VHS were also made available to the emergency workers aboard the Ship. There were evening showings of films every night in the large theater-like lecture room on the ship adjacent to the Library; other times the crew could borrow movies to watch in their cabins. Communication became crucial when more of the communication infrastructure in the area was destroyed or severely damaged. The Library’s computers were connected to the Ship’s satellite communication system so that email became possible and available. The relief workers were able to remain in communication with their families, friends and company’s head quarters during the six months of their stay. The Ship’s library served a humanitarian duty for six months in New Orleans. The return of the ship was a homecoming celebration, a New York Times article wrote on March 9, 2006 [9].

Super Storm Sandy, 2012

In the fall of 2012, after Super Storm Sandy struck the New York and New Jersey area, The *Empire State VI* was assigned to billet AmeriCorps -Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) Corps and FEMA workers, from outside the region. Over 400 New York City and New Jersey area first responders, AmeriCorps FEMA Corps and FEMA’s Surge Capacity Force Personnel lived, slept and ate on the Ship for months. This time the Training Ship *Empire State VI* was docked at the tip of the Throgs Neck Peninsula on the campus of SUNY Maritime College.

The federal government was in great need of emergency shelter for thousands of employees arriving in New York to assist with relief and recovery efforts. Due to the close proximity to New York City, Long Island and New Jersey, the Ship was docked at the campus of SUNY Maritime College.
Island, and New Jersey, SUNY Maritime College offered the Ship’s sleeping and eating accommodation to FEMA workers.

Andrew Baas, 32, a federal employee sent to New York as part of a recovery team, told the folks back home in Everett, Pa., that he was helping Hurricane Sandy victims in south Brooklyn and sleeping on a ship docked at the base of a bridge in the Bronx [10]

For many it was their first time aboard a large vessel. Most persons were expected to serve 45 days, working 12-hour days, seven days a week, going door-to-door offering federal aid, connecting those in need with vital services, or just listening to the frustration in neighborhoods devastated by the massive storm.

Once again, the Ship’s library became a place of refuge. The workers would return to campus on buses physically and emotionally exhausted. They would board the ship docked by the pier and have dinner served from the ship’s mess deck. Then they made their way to the ship’s library. They socialized with each other, some rushed to the computers to connect with their friends and families, other sat on comfortable couches, read a book, talked with each other, played board games that the library provided, and watched movies on DVDs.

The library as a physical facility provided “a change of scenery”. More importantly it provided an emotional escape from the day’s events, and gave rest to the exhausted mind and the body. The FEMA workers were volunteers from all parts of the United States. Most of them were young people from all geographic and socio-economic background who took on the task to respond to their fellow citizens in need.

Conclusion

For each instance of natural disaster or terrorist attack, the Library aboard the Empire State VI became the place where people escaped the unbearable realities of the day. With a book at hand, a movie, a magazine, at the couch in a safe corner they tried to reconnect with their inner-worlds while attempting to balance the effects and the trauma of the terrifying experiences in their daily lives.

In all instances, the librarians provided support, answered questions and made collections of fiction and non-fiction available. They showed movies at night on the large screens of the ship’s movie theater, they socialized and conversed with the relief workers in an effort to do their part in bringing “normality” in tired volunteers’ lives. The library’s Wi-Fi connections and the library’s computers made email and
internet searching possible so that the relief workers can connect with their families, send messages and pictures, and shared news and experiences with friends and loved ones.

In so many ways, the Ship’s Library became the place of refuge, for the soul and for the mind. During the most extraordinary events that challenge our faith and our humanity, we come to realize the true nature and the role that our libraries play that speak to the core of our human values.

References


