

Study: Smith County Libraries Lacking

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By BETTY WATERS

Staff Writer



EDITOR'S NOTE: This is the first story in a three-part series on the state of the library system in Smith County. The series continues through Tuesday.

Smith County public libraries have smaller collections and lower circulation, spend less on materials, and have lower incomes than libraries across the state and nation, a Tyler League of Women Voters study found.

Statistics compiled by the LWV compared the six Smith County libraries with similar-sized libraries, as well as with state and national library data. "Smith County libraries don't compare particularly well with the rest of the state or the rest of the nation, but the smaller libraries definitely have higher rankings because their per capita figures are much higher than the larger libraries," said Scherel Carver, co-chairwoman of the LWV-Tyler Study Committee on Public Library Services. Committee Chairwoman Katheryn Hetherly said the LWV hopes the study findings will "make the public more aware of what a really good library would mean" and lead to steps to increase services and funding.

Not only do Smith County libraries compare poorly with the state and nation, but Texas is ranked 46th in the U.S. on per capita funding for library collection materials and library staffing in 2005, the latest year figures are available. The state ranks 47th for total per capital expenditures on public libraries. In comparison with libraries serving populations from 50,000 to 100,000, Tyler Public Library has low percentile ratings in many categories.

The stats look bad now for the Tyler library, both LWV spokeswomen said, but they worry they will look worse when the city tops 100,000 population and it is compared to bigger cities, such as Arlington.

Ms. Carver and Ms. Hetherly fear that could affect the library's membership in state library organizations and its standing to receive public funds.

The LWV gathered statistical data, surveyed Smith County residents, conducted focus group sessions to garner concerns and comments, and took other measures in conducting the study.

While the number of libraries in the county has increased, many areas still do not have a library.

Only Tyler and Bullard had public libraries back in the early 1980s, but through the years libraries also began operating in Lindale, Noonday, Whitehouse and Troup. Yet statistical data from the Texas State Library and Archives Commission shows 44.7 percent of Smith County's total population, or about 81,100 people, reside in areas without a public library.

According to data from the LWV study, the percentage of the county's population served is 47.9 percent by the Tyler public library, 3.4 percent by Whitehouse, 1.9 percent by Lindale, 1.1 percent by Troup, 0.7 percent by Bullard, and 0.3 percent by Noonday.

Each library has a service area approved by the state, but many areas of Smith County do not have a library, although a county resident residing outside a library's service area can check out books, Ms. Carver said.

Data from the LWV study further showed many Smith County libraries are in the lowest percentile on performance measures.

Smith County libraries have fewer magazine subscriptions, lower numbers of volumes and smaller budgets for library materials than libraries serving the same population nationwide in American Public Library rankings.

For example, Tyler Public Library subscribed to 295 magazines in 2004, which equates to 3.4 magazine subscriptions per 1,000 population - well below the national average of 4.6 subscriptions in libraries in other cities the same size across the nation.

The Noonday library had no library subscriptions, compared with the national average of 30.3 for libraries its size nationwide.

Total operating expenditures per capita by libraries in Smith County averaged \$20.28 per capita in 2004, the latest year for which statistics are available.

That's slightly better than the statewide average of \$17.85, but still considerably below the national average of \$31.33.

But Tyler Public Library, at \$14.16 expended per capita, is far below the state average, and Whitehouse Community Library has the lowest per capita expenditures of all Smith County libraries at \$3.21 in 2004, a figure almost doubled to \$6.29 in 2005.

The Bullard Community Library's total operating expenditures averaged \$20.76 per capita, Lindale Library, \$18.59, Troup Municipal Library, \$26.96 and Noonday Community Library, \$20.94.

Libraries nationally averaged total circulation of 8.3 volumes per capita and the state average is 5.68 per capita, according to public library data from the National Center for Education Statistics. Tyler Public Library's circulation at 2.24 per capita fell below both national and state averages, as well as the county average of 10.89.

Total circulation for other Smith County libraries was 2.83 per capita for Whitehouse, 7.49 for Noonday, 10.05 for Troup, 7.49 for Noonday, 20.67 for Lindale and 14.02 for Bullard.

The Tyler library's collection size and turnover rate met "basic" standards, the lowest ranking in a list of library criteria for public libraries serving populations from 50,000 to 100,000 developed by the Texas Library Association

Staffing at some Smith County libraries is below national averages for libraries serving the same size population. For example, the Tyler library in 2005 had 0.3 staff members per 1000 population compared with the national average of 0.5 for libraries its size and the Whitehouse library had 0.18 staff per 1,000 compared with the national per capita average of 0.6 for libraries its size.

The national average for library visits per capita is almost six. Smaller libraries in Smith County easily meet that because of small populations in their service areas. Tyler is low at 1.63 library visits per capita and Whitehouse is also low as 2.05. Library visits per capita at other Smith County libraries were 4.54, Troup; 8.99 Noonday; 10.70, Lindale and 10.44, Bullard.

Libraries nationwide and state-wide average operating 39 hours per week in 2004, according to the National Center for Education Statistics.

Tyler Public Library exceeded those averages by operating 56 hours per week. Lindale and Bullard almost met the state and national averages at 38 and 37, respectively. Whitehouse library operated 28 hours a week, Noonday library, 25 hours; and Troup library, 20 hours.

The Smith County libraries did meet the minimum required number of hours of operation for their size set by the Texas State Library and Archives Commission.

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Finding Funding By BETTY WATERS Staff Writer

(Staff Photo By Amy Peterson)



Low levels of financial support by local governments contribute to an inadequate funding problem confronting Smith County public libraries.

BROWSING BOOKS: Lindale Library intern Kendra Love (left) reorganizes books while Lanelle Parks looks for a book Thursday at the Lindale Library.

EDITOR'S NOTE: This is the second story in a three-part series on the state of the library system in Smith County. The series continues through Tuesday.

Low levels of financial support by local governments contribute to an inadequate funding problem confronting Smith County public libraries.

A Tyler League of Women Voters study of Smith County public library services uncovered the financial plight of the county's six public libraries.

Statistical data showing low funding came from Texas State Library and Archives Commission and from a study of Texas public libraries by the national consulting firm Himmel and Wilson, commissioned by TSLAC.

Overall, Texas ranked 46th among the states in funding for public libraries in 2005. But the funding problem does not exist just in Texas. Data compiled by the American Library Association showed approximately \$162 million in funding cuts to libraries nationwide in 2004.

A Public Agenda survey in 2006 found the public mostly unaware of financial difficulties facing libraries.

Total per capita funding for Texas libraries was \$16.11 in 2004, compared with the national average total income per person of \$28.96, according to the LWV study. That is the latest year comparisons are available with national averages.

A breakdown of library income showed public libraries in Texas averaged receiving \$15.26 in 2004 from cities per person, while library income nationwide from cities averaged \$22.32 per person.

City funding for all Smith County libraries falls below state and national averages, the LWV study found. Funding from municipalities where most of the libraries are located constitute only a small portion of their income. Since the libraries lack sufficient city government financial support, organizations called "Friends of the Library" often spearhead fundraising campaigns for operational expenses of most Smith County libraries. They sponsor bake sales, carnivals and other events to generate funding for the libraries.

"The league would like to see them tax-supported; right now they are supported in a hodgepodge manner where people are just having to go out and have street carnivals and bake sales," said Scherel Carver, co-chairwoman of the LWV-Tyler study committee on public library services.

Unlike the smaller county libraries, Tyler Public Library depends primarily on city funds, with a small percentage of its budget coming from fundraising and grants.

Tyler Public Library receives 99 percent of its funding - approximately \$1.3 million - from the city annually. That amounts to about \$14.50 per person in its service area, according to the LWV report, but is still about \$8 below the national average for per capital municipal library funding.

The LWV data showed city funding for other Smith County libraries. In 2005, the Bullard library received \$6,000 or \$4.09 per capita; Lindale, \$13,500 or \$3.54 per capita; Noonday, \$6,000 or \$11.07 per capita; Troup, \$10,000 or \$4.93 per capita; and Whitehouse, \$30,000 or \$4.40 per capita.

The libraries receive no funding from Smith County or from federal sources, the LWV study report stated. State improvement funding is a source for libraries - based on population in a library's service, how much the city supports the library and other factors - but is not a substantial amount, LWV spokespersons said.

To find funds for operations, smaller libraries in Smith County resort to knocking on doors and asking people to give money, said Carver. The libraries also conduct special fundraising projects, such as bake sales and street carnivals.

Libraries are an important community asset that the cities themselves need to support and the LWV would like to see the cities funnel more tax revenue to them, Ms. Carver said.

"We could go to county commissioners and say we want funds for all these libraries," Ms. Carver said, but dismissed that approach because the LWV believes it would be "futile" to ask Smith County commissioners for library funding. County commissioners in some other counties, such as Gregg County, do support their library.

A survey by Americans for Libraries Council found the American people expect and prize library service and consider libraries essential to their community, but that many elected leaders are reluctant to consider making libraries a funding priority.

Yet libraries received the best grades of any community institution in the ALC national survey, with four in 10 respondents giving them an "A" - a higher grade than they gave public schools and police.

In an LWV survey of Smith County residents, 76-84 percent of respondents rated library staff helpfulness and knowledge as good or very good, 69-73 percent rated the building layout and signage as good or very good, 70 percent rated children's services as good, 58 percent rated reference services as good and 55 percent rated library collections as good.

Nationally, 59 percent of library users surveyed by ALC and 47 percent of non-users favored increasing taxes to provide needed additional funds for local libraries, although most were unaware of the funding challenges confronting libraries.

Most Americans believe libraries use tax resources wisely, the survey found, so libraries do not have to fight the argument the "cut the waste first" attitude the public has on many other issues of public funding, the survey report stated.

The state Legislature created an avenue for increasing library income that has not been explored in Smith County.

The Legislature passed a bill in 1997 allowing the formation of library districts funded with sales tax revenue, the law in 2005 to give the option of funding new library districts through a property tax, as

well as a sales and use tax, or both.

A bill proposed in the upcoming legislative session would further amend the library district law to allow creation of multi-county districts.

Ms. Carver does not see any movement toward an attempt to form a library district in Smith County or with other areas. The libraries appear open to the idea, but at present the emphasis is on encouraging cooperation among the libraries, she said.

A library district would be required to have a board of trustees who could hire employees, acquire property, borrow money, impose fees for district service and impose ad valorem taxes and a sales and use tax.

Bullard Community Library
211 W. Main St.
903-894-6125
bullardlibrary@goquest.com
www.bullardlibrary.org
M&F 10-4, Tue & Thur 10-6, Sat 10-2

Lindale Library
200 E. Hubbard St.
903-882-1900
www.lindalelibrary.org
Tue-Fri 10-5, Sat 10-2

Noonday Community Library
16662 CR 196
903-939-0540
noondaylibrary@suddenlinkmail.com
Tues 10-4, Wed, Thur & Fri 10-5, Sat 10-2

Troup Municipal Library
102 S. Georgia
903-842-3101
trouplibrary@hotmail.com
www.trouptexas.org/library/libabout.html
Tue, Wed & Fri 1-5, Thurs 3-7, Sat 9-1

Tyler Public Library
201 S. College Avenue
903-593-7323
library@tylertexas.com
www.tylerlibrary.com
Mon-Thurs 10-8, Fri-Sat 10-5, Sun 1-5

Whitehouse Community Library
107 Bascom Dr. 903-839-2949
whitehousetx.library@hotmail.com
www.whitehousetx.booksys.net
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Library Coalition Born of LWV Recommendations

Article published Feb 25, 2007

By BETTY WATERS

Staff Writer

After a library study, Tyler League of Women Voters suggested more collaboration among Smith County's six libraries to bring about library improvements and more service to library users.

The LWV recommendation led to the formation of a coalition, called Smith County Area Libraries Together.

SALT has accomplished a cooperative approach by the libraries, said Scherel Carver, co-chairwoman of the LWV Study Committee on Public Library Services. The libraries were not accustomed in the past to collaborating and trying to pull things off in a concerted effort, Ms. Carver said.

About 20 representatives from libraries in Bullard, Lindale, Noonday, Troup, Tyler and Whitehouse brainstormed at the first SALT meeting last March about what could be done working together as a group to improve the libraries. SALT's purpose, states an information sheet on the organization, is "to make local public libraries better serve the people of Smith County through libraries' working more closely together and making services available to all county residents."

SALT started out meeting quarterly, but later began meeting every other month and sometimes monthly. "We just want to start with library cooperation," Ms. Carver said.

SALT published a brochure for distribution to newcomers, library users and non-users briefly describing services furnished by each Smith County library.

SALT members also banded together for a joint observance of "Love Your Library Month" in February and are also working in a collaborative effort to plan celebration of Library Week in April. They adopted 65 reasons to "love your library" developed by the public relations committee of the Texas Library Association and secured proclamations of Love Your Library Month in February in cities throughout Smith County.

The new organization also developed and distributed a countywide calendar for February events and activities at the libraries.

"Every library is different, so every library has its own unique goals. We are trying to come up with some goals (for SALT) that mesh so that through working together, we can have a stronger program in a number of ways," Ms. Carver said.

SALT is moving toward establishing a central Web site, although the individual libraries have Web sites.

One of the new organization's first moves was to seek more exposure and publicity through the news media about Smith County libraries, their services and needs. "We hope in our next phase to target the city councils to increase funding to the six libraries," Ms. Carver said.

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Ready Resources: Libraries' Offerings Diverse



(Staff Photo By Amy Peterson)

BROWSING BOOKS: Emma Jones works the front desk at the Lindale Library.

EDITOR'S NOTE: This is the third story in a three-part series on the state of the library system in Smith County. The series continues through Tuesday.

By BETTY WATERS
Staff Writer

Smith County's six libraries have expanded beyond traditional collections of books to information available through modern technology and varied programs on topics ranging from global warming to children's stories.

Libraries are no longer simply aisles bordered by rows of shelved books, magazines, newspapers and other reference materials. They have evolved into places offering

computer access to the Internet and repositories for microfilm, microfiche, audio tapes, CDs, videotapes, DVDs, etceteras. The libraries also have become centers for community activities such as discussion of current events and places where organizations meet.

Public libraries in Tyler, Bullard, Lindale, Troup, Noonday and Whitehouse fulfill many educational, informational, cultural and recreational needs

in their communities.

"The sky is the limit" as far as library services, said Kathryn Hetherly, who chaired a study of Smith County libraries by the League of Women Voters of Tyler. The literacy movement in Texas really got its start in public libraries and then many community literacy programs spun off literacy efforts in the libraries, pointed out Scherel Carver, co-chairwoman of the LWV study committee.

The Smith County libraries offer books and programs for all ages, newspapers and magazines, large-print books as well as regular-print fiction and nonfiction books, CDs and audio tapes, videos and DVDs, computers and Internet access, electronic databases, reference materials, Fax machines and copiers, inter-library loan and librarian assistance. Bullard Community Library, 211 W. Main St., which opened roughly 30 years ago, has an extensive genealogical collection for family research, videotapes, audio books, interlibrary loan and offers patrons high speed Internet access as well as more than 18,000 items in its collection for children, youths and adults.

The computers are equipped with educational games for children, Microsoft Office programs, reference materials, tutorials for office products, Internet Explorer for free Internet access, TexShare Databases and an electronic catalog.

The Bullard library offers a summer reading club, basic computer classes, tutoring, English as a second language helps, AARP tax assistance and other services.

Lindale Library opened in 2002 at 200 E. Hubbard St. and is the county's newest library. It offers public access computers, genealogy workshops and resources, audio books, DVD and VHS titles, community events, story times and visits from characters in children's

books.

Noonday Community Library, 16662 CR 196, is a full-service library providing a comfortable atmosphere for reading, using computers and work stations.

The Cameron-J. Jarvis Troup Municipal Library, 102 S. Georgia, houses more than 24,000 books, videos and audio items. It also has a special collection of genealogical and local history materials, separate sections for children and young adults and a computer center.

The Troup library conducts a summer reading program for children, a monthly game day for seniors, a fall luncheon and silent auction.

It offers Internet access on computers, copier and fax service and houses more than 24,000 books, videos and audio items.

The Troup library has separate sections for children and young adults and serves as the meeting place for the Troup City Council, Meals on Wheels and many other local organizations and events.

Whitehouse Community Library has an extensive book collection, Internet computers, VHS and DVD offerings, books on tape and CDs. It provides children's computers, story time, adult programs, scrapbook activities, inter-library loan, TexShare databases and tax assistance.

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Whitehouse Community Library
107 Bascom Drive
903-839-2949
whitehouselibrary@hotmail.com
www.whitehousetx.booksys.net
Mon, Tues, Thur & Fri 12-6, Sat 11-4

The Whitehouse library also offers faxing, laminating and copying services, a "Hayride with Santa" and National Library Week events.

LARGE LIBRARY

Tyler Public Library, 201 S. College Ave., is a major information center and home to many community events, from organizational meetings to preschool activities, slide shows and reading aloud of classic plays.

Besides a large collection of

fiction and nonfiction books, the Tyler library has approximately 300 magazine subscriptions and some 9,700 reference tools, such as encyclopedias, almanacs, dictionaries, histories and other records.

It has areas for children, youths and adults and a specialized section for local and family history. The Tyler library offers 60 public-access computers, with 17 offering access to the Internet. Non-residents of Tyler have unlimited use of resources in-house and may borrow items for 40 cents each.

The Tyler library operates a Bookmobile that travels to low- and moderate-income neighborhoods throughout the city to facilitate access to library resources, while Taylor

Auditorium inside the downtown library complex is the site of numerous programs and events staged by the library and different organizations and groups.

Those include the "Great Decisions" program, an annual series of meetings featuring discussions of foreign policy issues, led primarily by professors from The University of Texas at Tyler sponsored by the library, American Association of University Women and League of Women Voters of Tyler.

Another presentation co-sponsored by the library, East Texas Genealogical Society and Smith County Historical Society is the showing of a four-part PBS series titled "African

American Lives," originally broadcast in 2006.

The auditorium also hosts events for preschoolers, such as times for reading aloud and crafts. Women's Symphony League and Friends of the Library present a program of "Symphony Stories" designed to introduce children to music played by East Texas Symphony Orchestra.

The auditorium is where groups such as East Texas Genealogical Society and Texas Writers' Network meet. Special exhibits have featured a history of Texas A&M University and Black History Month. Another community service, AARP volunteers offer free tax assistance to people of all ages with middle and low incomes.

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Tyler Public Library Provides Specialized Genealogy Room

By BETTY WATERS

Staff Writer

A specialized local and family history room at Tyler Public Library contains a wealth of resources for anyone researching history or genealogy.

The special collections room houses many books, documents, records, histories, microfilm and microfiche, newspapers, magazines, maps, et ceteras - none of which can be checked out.

Visitors can make notes or copies, but "nothing leaves this room," said Barbara Galbreath, access associate.

Computers are available to aid people using the room, which is lined with cabinets and shelves stocked with varied materials.

All of the materials, books and documents can be beneficial in many ways to anyone doing research, Ms. Galbreath said. She cited as examples students preparing papers or reports on historical events, researchers gathering statistics, family members checking genealogy, someone trying to document family ancestry to gain mem-

bership in organizations such as Daughters of the American Revolution or Sons of the Republic of Texas

In the cabinets is the federal census on microfilm for most southern states from the time the states began to 1880. The Texas census is available from 1850 to 1930, the most recent federal census released to the public. Census information cannot be released for 72 1/2 years under the privacy act.

There are also special census information, such as an agricultural census, scholastic or school census, voter registration records and an index of Texas Confederate soldiers.

The census data is helpful to people researching genealogy, Ms. Galbreath said, since it in some years, asks who is the head of a household and who lives in the household, their ages, race, sex, profession, when they came to the U.S. and whether they are a naturalized citizen.

If the census shows a person is

a naturalized citizen, someone researching genealogy can then acquire a copy of the naturalization papers which may have more information, Ms. Galbreath said.

The room also has Texas birth and death records, Smith County marriage records, East Texas tax records, city directories, Chronicles of Smith County, the International Genealogical Index from the Latter Day Saints Church, cemetery information, biographies and other data.

Publications on file in the room include newspapers, genealogy magazines and other local magazines.

A vertical local history file contains clippings about Tyler, Smith County and East Texas. An individual file is kept on the Rose Festival every year.

History books are available on black history, the different states, the Civil War, Revolutionary War and other topics.