Business Services Rooted in the Community

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Business Resource Center
What I’ll cover

- Visual Tour of Simsbury
- Simsbury Public Library
- Business Resource Center
- Role of Business Outreach Librarian
- The Future
Simsbury

- Community of 23,000 people
- Located in the Farmington River Valley
- Simultaneously suburban, industrial and rural
- Ranks 33rd in wealth of CT’s towns
- Schools ranked #1 in state
Come along on a tour of our town....
As you approach the center of town
Our library is on the main street
Situated on a former estate with landscaped grounds
Next to a historic inn
Our Chamber of Commerce is in the former library
An old cemetery right in town
Simsbury is a nice place to walk
Businesses are located in former residences
There are many churches on the main street
We try to preserve parks and “open space”
There are several shopping centers in town
Located between the main street and a walking boulevard
Ironhorse Boulevard has sports fields and nature walks.
Nearby restaurants
Simsbury is located beside the Farmington River
Our “old” bridge is now a “Bridge of Flowers” pedestrian walkway.
We have one of the oldest trees in the State
People live here because of the historic charm
Simsbury’s Business Base

- Approx. 1300 total in town
- We believe about 600-700 of these are either
  - Home based
  - 1-2 person
There are 3 major employers in Simsbury....
The Town of Simsbury
And there are still farms in town
As you leave town you go through some small neighborhoods like Tariffville
Good bye!
We are surrounded by beauty but we still have our challenges!
Economic Development Challenges

- While Simsbury is located 20 minutes from an international airport
- We are 30 minutes from any major highways
- Land prices are high!
85% of the tax burden is carried by homeowners.
Town’s Challenge

“increase business awareness and utilization of Library facilities”*

*per Town of Simsbury’s Economic Development Strategic Plan of 1995
Our Response

- Create a Business Resource Center (BRC) within the Library

- Staff it with a Business Outreach Librarian who can work with town businesses, develop business programs and provide individual assistance
Why would they ask the Library for help?

- People in U.S. have high expectations of libraries.
- People use library for leisure, research, “lifelong learning” and for social interaction.
- Libraries mostly funded through town budget (taxpayers) & Friends Group
- In many cities libraries address social issues
Librarians are expected to:

- Be professionals with a Masters Degree in Library Science.
- “Know everything!”
- Perform thorough reference interviews.
- Identify & recommend resources.
- Foster information literacy & educated decision making.
In a typical day:

- We teach people how to use catalog, Internet, electronic databases.
- We show people where to find information on: purchasing a car, taking a trip, learning about diseases, what to read for pleasure, how to build a house, garden, invest, give driving directions, find words to a song and provide tourist information!
And we do this...

- by email, phone & in person
- 7 days a week
- from 9 am to 9 pm most days
- and sometimes after hours during special programs or events.
Simsbury Public Library

A typical public library
is a family place
We focus on early literacy
And have a very busy Children’s Department
A place to play, read & talk
But not just for children
You can chat with friends
Even have a snack!
If you have a question
There's lots of reference books
computers and technology
areas for group study
or for a portable office
Community Information
Community Nonprofit events
And did you know?

- the Library is used by more than 850 people daily

- About 60% of the population are active library users.
The Simsbury Public Library

- in FY 2003, our budget is $1,062,771 or $46 per capita
- annual circulation, 468,405, or just over 20 circs per capita, more than double the state average
- circulation jumped 7.5% in one year
- in 2002, ranked among the top one hundred public libraries in the country (out of 9,000) by the Hennen American Public Library Ratings
- #1 out of Connecticut’s 169 public libraries
Why a Business Resource Center?

- Highly visible, centrally located, neutral place
- Open a variety of hours (days & evenings)
- Web site offers 24 hour/day access
- Trained staff to gather & evaluate information & help patrons synthesize information
How did we identify need for BRC?

- Economic Development Plan of 1994
- Survey of library patrons
- Observation of Library Director and staff
The need defined

- Get potential entrepreneurs’ knowledge up to level where they can articulate their business needs effectively to other organizations like S.C.O.R.E., banks, Small Business Administration (S.B.A.) etc.
BRC opened September 1999!

- Staffed initially with part-time librarian
- July 2000 became full-time position
What does it look like?

- Located in Reference Department
- Approximately 250 square feet
- Containing...
Business Reference Books

- Business Reference arranged by function
  - Job & Career
  - General Business & Economy
  - Company Information
  - Personal Finance & Investing
Business Periodicals
Seminars & workshop information

Information from SCORE, SBA and other area organizations
Business Services

- 6 Internet workstations
- 4 PCs with Office 97
- Fax Machine
- Photocopiers
- Typewriter
Small Conference Area
Display table for new business materials

- Located near photocopy room
Business Outreach Librarian

- Very important part of service
- Visible advertisement for BRC
- Trained & knowledgeable
My Goal

- To help business people obtain quality information efficiently.
- An entrepreneur’s priority should be on the synthesis of information not on the process of obtaining the information.
How do I identify needs?

- Talk with other libraries and organizations like Chamber of Commerce & SCORE
- Talk to & observe patrons
- Go out into the community
What does the Business Outreach Librarian do?

- 17.5 hours a week I’m a “regular” Reference Librarian

- 17.5 hours a week devoted to Business services
Business Services include:

- Collection Development
- Developing & hosting Library’s business programs
- Networking & town meetings
- Outside speaking engagements
- Committee work
- Communicating with staff
Business patron #1

- Heard about BRC from Nancy
- Wants to buy health food store in town
- 1 year later wants to expand

Sheryl
Typical business patron #2

- Heard about BRC from wife
- Unemployed
- Decided to pursue dream of opening business
- 1 year later still attends workshops

Steve
What does all this cost?

- About $75K a year
- Salary is biggest part (60%)
- Databases $12K
- Materials - no significant increase since BRC opened
- Programs - almost nothing!
Managing the Budget

- We’re more selective in our choices
- Our biggest purchase is our subscription to Reference USA database
- We take full advantage of the Digital Library databases and free web based resources
- Low cost promotion
Donations?

- No active solicitation
- $500 donation from local bank
- “In Kind” donations - speakers fees
Keys to Success

- Commitment of Library Administration
- Flexible scheduling
Are we successful?

YES
How do we measure success?

- # Programs doubled
- Attendance doubled
- From Sept 2002-May 2003 over 690 people attended programs
- Over 440 were “new” patrons
Connecticut Library Association Award 2002

- Excellence in Public Library Service Award
- A model for other libraries
Business Community

- Tells us how valuable the services are
- Are more willing to donate goods & services to library programs
- $50K donated for new BRC in expanded Library
- Chamber of Commerce has offered to help fund databases
Increased Tax Base

- Hard to calculate
- We have aided new businesses
- We have kept existing businesses in town
The Future

  - 5% more business usage per year
  - More databases & with remote access
  - Computer Lab & Training Center
  - Employment Room
  - More meeting space
To Put Business Services on the same level as Children’s Services—
Totally Indispensable!
Thank You!