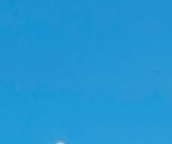


Hudson Valley

Contrary to Popular Belief, the Hudson Valley's Libraries Are Thriving

With events like drum circles and zen drawing, as well as expanding digital collections, your local library has quietly morphed into an amazing community mecca

BY MARY FORSELL



The Albert Wisner Public Library in Warwick was named the Best Small Public Library in America

Have you checked out your local library lately? What's that? In this high-tech age, you just don't see the need anymore?

Well, look again. Because while you've had your nose in your Kindle, or have been buying books on Amazon, many local libraries have quietly undergone an amazing transformation. These days, many libraries are now community hubs, dynamic places where you can try your hand at techie activities like videography, coding, robotics, and Web design. Other patrons experiment with crafts, learn to speak Italian, run their own businesses from a shared work space, even stream current movies or download tunes through services like Freegal.

It's true, there's not a card catalog in sight, but you are sure to see a ton of computers, lively displays of the latest books and DVDs, and maybe even some sculptures by a local artist.

Yes, no longer stodgy spaces where you're ordered to hush or else, your local library may well be the hippest hangout in town.

Definitely bring the kids. They don't have to be quiet — which is a good thing, as they will likely be playing around with cool activities like Lego club, video gaming, or hip-hop class. And with **National Library Week** taking place April 10-16, you can bet your bookbag that there's going to be even more on offer. For instance, Poughkeepsie's **Adriance Memorial Library** will unveil its new collection of 3-D printers by MakeBot, while its sister branch, the **Boardman Road Library**, which opened in April 2015, will host *New York Times* columnist Frank Bruni.

"Providing free educational and entertainment programs to the community has become as much an imperative as providing quality books," says **Phoenicia Library** Director Liz Potter, who actually loans out ukuleles and fishing rods alongside traditional tomes at her rocking rural outpost.

Kinderhook Memorial Library Director AnnaLee Giraldo puts it this way: "Everybody has been predicting the death of libraries and reading forever, but libraries are masters of adaptation. We are what the community needs us to be."

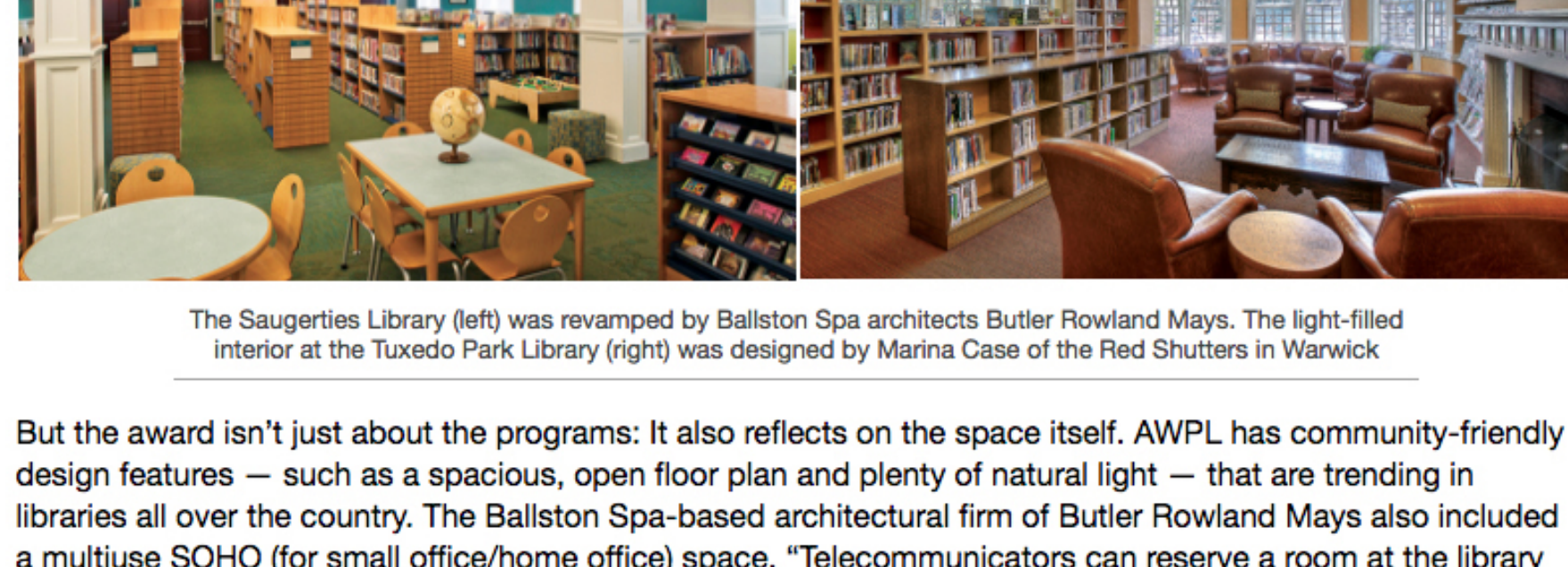


The Albert Wisner Public Library in Warwick

Loan Stars

In Warwick, the community spoke loud and clear in 2007 when residents approved an \$8.5 million bond to build a new library to replace a cramped relic. The resulting **Albert Wisner Public Library (AWPL)** opened in 2009, part of the **Ramapo Catskill Library System**. Build it and they will come: The facility pulled in an impressive 183,007 physical and 132,282 virtual visits during the last fiscal year. Additionally, about 20,000 people attended one of its 1,379 programs, which vary from a senior improv group and interactive animal exhibits to the very popular Movie Mondays, when current flicks are shown for free in the community room. "At our former location, we had two parking spaces," says Librarian Rosemary Cooper. "Now we have 60, but it's still not enough."

Such resounding success earned AWPL the highly coveted **Best Small Library in America Award for 2016** from *Library Journal*. The award, cosponsored by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, comes along with a \$20,000 cash prize (which could come in handy for adding some more parking).

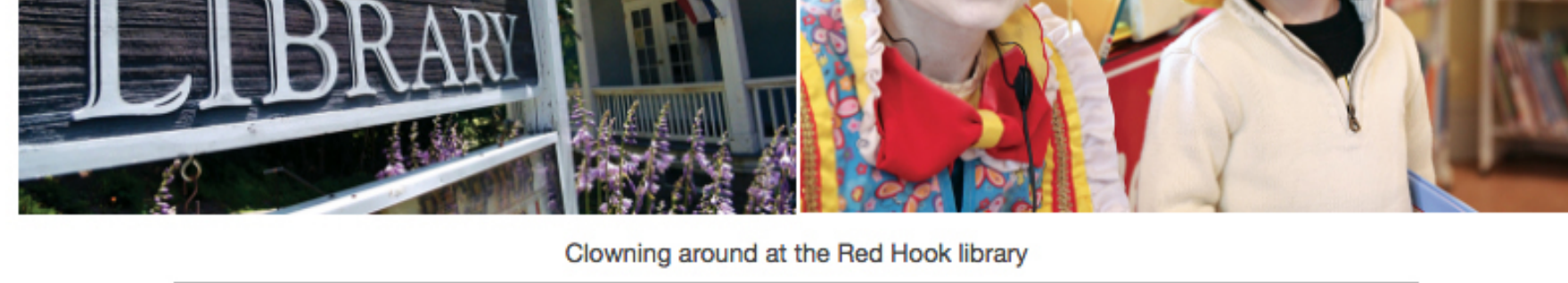


The Saugerties Library (left) was revamped by Ballston Spa architects Butler Rowland Mays. The light-filled interior at the Tuxedo Park Library (right) was designed by Marina Case of the Red Shutters in Warwick

But the award isn't just about the programs: It also reflects on the space itself. AWPL has community-friendly design features — such as a spacious, open floor plan and plenty of natural light — that are trending in libraries all over the country. The Ballston Spa-based architectural firm of Butler Rowland Mays also included a multiuse SOHO (for small office/home office) space. "Telecommunicators can reserve a room at the library and hold a meeting there for two hours, and it's already wired for Skype," says Architect Paul Mays. "Later in the day, that same room can be used for distance learning for kids to take college courses online."

Flexible seating is another in-demand feature, says Mays. The popularity of collaborative learning and students working on joint projects inspired a take on an old-fashioned soda shop scene with kids crowding around the jukebox. In this case, a computer on a table stands in for the jukebox; it's surrounded by easy-to-move benches.

Still, people will always love alone-time with their books, believes Mays. That's why cozy reading niches and conversation pits flooded with calming natural light are sought-after library features found not only at AWPL, but also at the **Saugerties** and **Cairo** public libraries, which Mays's firm redesigned. "Creating that ownership of space is an important feature," says Mays. "It's a completely different space from, say, the cavernous **New York Public Library** reading room."



Clowning around at the Red Hook library

Growing Pains

Ask a librarian how things have changed in their world, and you're going to hear the numbers. **Red Hook Public Library** Director Erica Freudenberger reports that, when she assumed her position in 2010, the library hosted about 240 programs annually. In 2015, it held some 635 events on topics like beekeeping, winemaking, and raising chickens — all led by local experts. Which is why the library, housed in an iconic octagonal building, is doing some serious renovations to the second floor to open it up for meeting space.

Same story over in **Kinderhook**, where a capital campaign is underway to increase the size of the library from 2,120 to 6,400 square feet. So far, ground has been broken on a 450-square-foot reading room. "All of this growth is very overdue for us," says Director Giraldo. "Our foot traffic has increased dramatically, from 59,490 visits in 2014 to 68,882 in 2015. We are literally and figuratively bursting at the seams."

The building boom is happening all around the region. In addition to Warwick, brand-new libraries have opened in Gardiner and Highland.



The Gardiner Library includes special technology for the hearing impaired

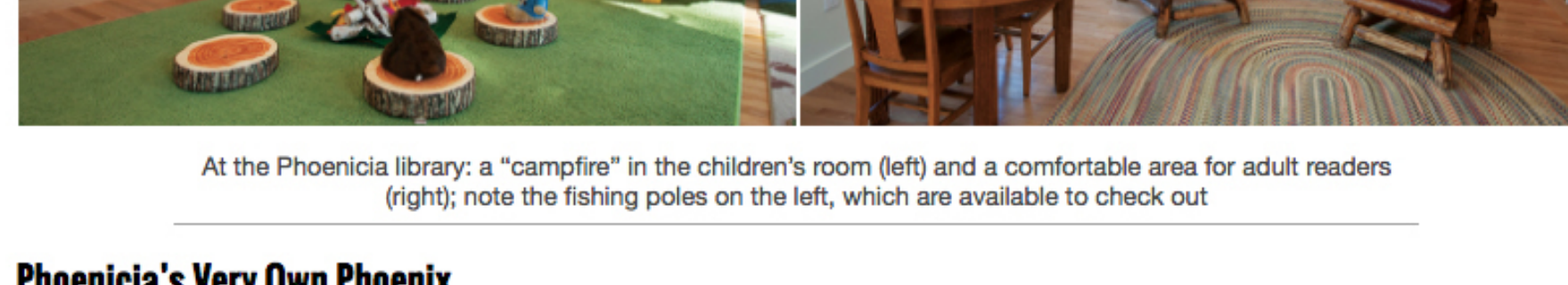
In the Loop

When the **Gardiner Public Library** outgrew its original reading room in the former fire house, the community chipped in to build a 4,500-square-foot facility in 2008. "We try to be central to the life of the town," says Manager Nicole Lane. In an area of less than 6,000 residents, there are 4,000 card-carrying library members, who racked up 28,000 visits in 2015, reports Lane. They came for children's programs like weekly storytime and summer reading. And they filled up adult sessions that include ESL, wellness classes like yoga and tai chi, and even an innovative repair clinic run by the Gardiner Transfer Station with the goal of keeping castoff objects out of the waste stream.

Lane is especially proud that the library installed an innovative hearing loop (an assisted hearing technology) in the community room. It works through an induction loop system (cleverly positioned behind a picture rail) and transmits clear, pure sound directly to a user's hearing aids without any distortion or background noise. "They're all over Europe, and we've been slow in this country to adapt to the technology, though the New York subway system supposedly had put them in their ticket booths."

What's a Maker Space?

The hottest trend in libraries is the use of "maker spaces," workstations where people create projects as simple as making a Popsicle stick craft or as involved as editing a video. A local leader in this movement is the **Alice Curtis Desmond & Hamilton Fish Library** in Garrison, Putnam County, where Project Code Spring is thriving. It was started three years ago by IT professionals who were concerned by the lack of computer science and coding being taught in school. Offered jointly by Pam McCluskey, the library's full-time "cybrarian"; Librarian Krista Miller; intern Jason Zielinski; parents; and volunteers, the course has introduced more than 100 kids, some as young as six, to the basics of reading and writing computer code. Kids make their own "pet" computers using Raspberry Pi, a cheap general-purpose computer that's the size of a credit card. You can use it to learn to program and to experiment with electronics safely. "If they don't learn how to read and write code, they are in danger of being as programmed as the devices they hold," says McCluskey. "I want them to innovate and discover."



At the Phoenicia library: a "campfire" in the children's room (left) and a comfortable area for adult readers (right); note the fishing poles on the left, which are available to check out

Phoenicia's Very Own Phoenix

It seemed like a terrible tragedy at first: The circa-1860 **Phoenicia Library** went up in flames in March of 2011, destroying its collections and interior. The community quickly went into a fund-raising frenzy, doing everything from holding bake sales to applying for state grants to raise the necessary \$800,000 to rebuild. This past January, the library reopened with fanfare at its original spot, having expanded from 1,895 to 3,235 square feet.

"We added our first-ever children's room with a woodland theme, which opens into a small fenced yard that will have a native plant garden," reports Librarian Potter. There's also community rooms for art shows, movies, meetings, lectures, and readings. "Because our rooms had been crammed with stacks to maximize collection size, we never had a true open space to hold gatherings of more than a handful of people."

But there's more: It's the first Passive Solar Design library in America — meaning that its airtight building envelope, triple-glazed windows, and computer-calibrated ventilation system cut energy costs to a bare minimum.

"Our entire cost for all our utilities was \$1,200 in our first year, including the brutal 2015 winter," says Potter. This compares to oil and electric bills that were edging up towards \$8,000 a year for a far smaller building. We heat the entire 3,200-square-foot building with two electric heaters — each of which was designed to heat a single room."



Hudson's library is now located in the city's armory building

Teen Scene

By the time you read this, the **Hudson Area Library** will have packed up its collection of 30,000 books and DVDs from its cramped city building and moved across town to the newly renovated armory, where it will occupy some 12,000 square feet. Thanks to grant funds and private contributions, the library will finally have a community room for classes and performances, says Director Emily Chameides: "In our old space, there was very limited access for people with mobility issues. Now everything will be on one floor and accessible." Especially exciting is the addition of a teen room for the first time, a trend that's taking off all over the Valley. For instance, Kinderhook Library just hired its first teen librarian last year. At the Adriance library, the Teen Room is regularly packed with kids. "Technology areas have universal appeal to teens," says **Poughkeepsie Public Library District** Executive Director Tom Lawrence. "There's a loyal following. We offer them access to a teen media lab where they can create green screen experiences."



Too small to accommodate the increasing number of people who use it, the original Kinderhook Library is in the process of tripling its size

Are Books Going Away?

With the rise of the e-book, are print books doomed to disappear? Not a chance, say library folk. Giraldo of Kinderhook sees the book's future as rosy, citing three book clubs that meet monthly at her library. "Our circulation of books went up," she says. Poughkeepsie's Lawrence agrees. "Last year, we heard that the sale of e-books had dipped below traditional books," he says. "That's not what the publishing industry thought would happen."

The Mid-Hudson Library System By the Numbers

- The MHLs has a **shared online catalog** of more than **2.4 million items**, which library patrons can check out and have delivered to their local community library from any of the **66 libraries** in the Mid-Hudson Library System.
- Number of e-book and e-audiobook check-outs across the system are up **1,466 percent** from launch of service in 2010. The figure was **12,251** in 2010; by 2015, it was up to **191,895**. Find them all at <http://mhl.lib.overdrive.com>.
- Each day of the year, more than **600 e-books and e-audiobooks** are checked out by Hudson Valley residents.
- The e-magazine program just kicked off this year. Nearly **100 e-magazines** are available now at www.rbdigital.com/midhudsonlibsysny/service/zinio/landing.
- Total number of library materials checked out in 2015: **3,859,274**.