

## INTRODUCTION

For over 200 years, the public library has been a cornerstone of our democratic system. The public library can be – and for many is – a place where persons of all walks of life meet to discuss, to learn from one another, and to take advantage of the library as a fundamental resource of ideas and information. The public library is the embodiment of the democratic ideal and is a uniquely democratic institution. Their value, as a critical component of a democratic society, remains thoroughly engrained in our national psyche.

Funded primarily by the community it serves, governed locally, and used mainly by the people who pay for it via their taxes, the public library is a central physical and social place for the entire community. Access to the public library creates a level playing field for all people who come to it.

### PUBLIC OPINION REGARDING THEIR PUBLIC LIBRARY

Over the past 10 years, there have been national studies and surveys concerning what John and Jane Q. Public think about public libraries. Most recently, the Pew Research Center, in a survey conducted the last quarter of 2012, found that 91 percent of Americans (16 or older) say that public libraries are important to their communities, and 76 percent say libraries are important to them and their families.

In another 2012 Pew study, it was found that 60 percent of Americans under the age of 30 used the public library in the past year. And, in what may surprise those who fear the Facebook generations has given up on reading – or at least anything more than 140 characters – another report from the Pew Research Center’s “Internet and American Life Project” revealed the prominent role of books, libraries, and technology in the lives of those ages 16 to 30. The researches reported that about eight in 10 Americans under the age of 30 have read a book in the past year. That compares to about seven in 10 American adults. A 2006, a random-sample telephone survey of 1,003 adult

Americans conducted by KRC Research and Consulting<sup>1</sup>, revealed that two of every three persons surveyed visited their public library within the previous year. Ninety-six percent believed that, because public libraries provide free access to materials and resources, they play an important role in giving all persons a chance to succeed in life. Other findings of the survey:

- 85 percent indicated that public libraries deserve more funding, including nearly six of ten who strongly agreed;
- 52 percent believed \$41.00 or more should be spent per person in local tax support (the national average was about \$25.00 per person in 2006);
- 92 percent believed libraries will be needed in the future, even with all of the information available on the Internet; and
- Over one in three persons ranked the benefits of libraries at the top of the public services list as compared to schools, roads, and parks (an increase of six points over a similar survey completed in 2002).

This level of public support for public libraries has been consistent for over ten years. A study conducted by the Marist Institute for Public Opinion in 2003 concluded that 94 percent of Americans rate their local public library as “very valuable” or “valuable.” The majority even said that they would pay more taxes to support libraries – an average of \$49 more per year.<sup>2</sup>

### THE ECONOMIC IMPACT OF THE PUBLIC LIBRARY

Public libraries make tremendous economic impacts on counties and cities. The most recent study, conducted in 2012 by the University of Texas at Austin, found that for every dollar of public investment in public libraries, the return on that investment was \$4.42.

<sup>1</sup> KRC Research and Consulting, commissioned by the American Library Association, survey taken January 3-13, 2006 with a confidence factor +/- 3.1%.

<sup>2</sup> Vogel, Jennifer. “WHO NEEDS ALL THESE BOOKS, ANYWAY? In Defense of the Public Library.” *The Rake*, February 2005, p. 37.

In 2006, nine southwestern Ohio counties found that for every dollar spent on library operations the public received \$2.56 in directly quantifiable benefits. A 2005 study conducted by the University of South Carolina concluded that South Carolina receives \$4.48 in value for every dollar spent; a 350 percent return on investment. A year earlier, in 2004, Florida's public libraries return was determined to be \$6.54 for every \$1.00 invested from all sources. The statewide return on investment increased to \$8.32 in 2008, according to an updated report in 2010.<sup>3</sup>

The ability of a public library to serve as an “attractor” for business is another example of economic impact. The existence of a public library in an area adds to the quality of life, thereby increasing its attractiveness to business, and thus aiding in economic development.

Public libraries also create significant impacts by promoting literacy. A literate community is one that can be employed at higher-skilled, better-paying jobs. If the public library facilitates this employment, the impact of its services have had are considerable.

Providing job-seeking resources is another important economic development service public libraries provide. The public library is often a key resource for those seeking to change jobs or careers.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

The public library is an important part of any community. This is certainly true in Round Rock.

The public library improves the quality of life for everyone. It is also a major contributor to economic development, as shown in several studies over the past 10 years.

The future does belong to those who plan for it!

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<sup>3</sup> *Return on Investment in Florida Public Libraries 2010*, Haas Center for Business Research and Economic Development, University of West Florida, May, 2010.