

Libraries catering for digital demands

By TODD WARD

DESPITE a recent drop in visitor numbers to the Otorohanga District Library, librarian Sarah Osborne says it is still the “hub of the community”.

Competing against the might of the World Wide Web, visitor numbers and book issues are slowly declining at the Maniapoto St library, but the staff are fighting fire with fire.

By offering free internet use, Mrs Osborne says the number of digital ‘e-book’ downloads are “sky-rocketing” and 30 minute computer sessions are regularly booked out.

She says it is simply a “sign of the times”, and is highlighted when school gets out and students flock through the front door to use the free wireless internet service (WiFi).

“I think this trend is developing because people have busier lives now and more people are moving towards reading e-books.

“So what we (librarians) are trying to do is reinforce the value of developing good literacy skills for children and making libraries the place to foster their imagination.”

PROMOTIONS

To encourage more visitors, the library hosts several promotions such as the annual summer reading programme for primary school children, wriggle and rhyme active movement sessions for infants and toddlers, as well as hosting local and national authors to meet the public.

“Libraries are a community hub, because it’s not just where books are kept on shelves – it’s a welcoming environment where anybody can read, research and relax,” says Mrs Osborne.

“In a small town like Otorohanga, the library is a great council-provided resource, so I’d encourage everyone to come in and see for themselves just how useful it really is.”

DRIVER OF CHANGE

And the story reads much the same at Waitomo’s district library.

Book issues are down, but digital downloads and computer sessions are up.

Waitomo District Council customer services manager Helen Beever says technology is the single greatest driver of change for all libraries



NEW CHAPTER: Otorohanga district librarian Sarah Osborne says the community is moving away from the traditional hardcoverd books to e-books and using free WiFi services.

and the Waitomo District Library is changing to reflect that.

“The current trend is very clear. The use of e-services has risen by approximately 50% when comparing statistics between the 2011/2012 and 2012/2013 financial years and downloading ‘e-books’ and WiFi traffic is also on the rise.

“There is still a strong demand for access to printed material such as loan books, newspapers and magazines, however, the number of books issued has decreased by approximately 20%.”

5000 MEMBERS

Despite the changes, Mrs Beever says the library is still well supported by its 5000 members and provides many “great services” including a genealogy computer which can access the ancestry database,

CDs, DVDs, computer games, free e-book and audio-book downloads and daily newspapers.

“Children and young adults come to our library to do their homework, research, take part in library activities and use the computers to keep up with their daily reading,” she says.

“Adults use the library as somewhere quiet to go for time out, to catch

up on the latest news, research family history, attend book groups, use the computers, do long distance study and of course, make use of the large book collection.

“Basically, people come to the library to socialise, participate, learn, grow, create, enjoy, relax, and find information and I’m sure that will continue.”

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– Sarah Osborne –

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