

WESTCHESTER PUBLIC LIBRARY

FACT SHEET

2013

Porter County Public Libraries

There are two public library districts in Porter County. One is the Westchester Public Library that serves the residents of Westchester Township which includes the communities of Chesterton, Porter, Burns Harbor and Dune Acres. The other is the Porter County Public Library that serves the remainder of Porter County and that operates branches in Valparaiso, Portage, Kouts, South Haven, and Hebron.

A Brief History

Prior to the creation of the current Westchester Public Library, library service was provided by two independent public libraries. In 1914 the Town of Porter established its own town library, funded by a local tax and serving only its town residents. In 1919 Westchester Township began contracting with the Gary Public Library to provide service to the remainder of the township.

In the early 1970's it was decided that the library services and two store front facilities were insufficient to provide for the current and future needs of the township. In 1972 the two libraries officially merged to create a new municipal corporation serving all township residents.

In 1973 construction began on two new library facilities, Thomas Memorial Library in Chesterton and Hageman Memorial Library in Porter, both of which opened to the public in 1975. The Westchester Public Library Service Center was purchased in 1995 and repurposed to provide a home for the Chesterton Adult Learning Center, the library's technical services department, and to provide local citizens with a 150 person capacity community meeting room with an adjoining kitchen. In 2005 the library reached an agreement with the Duneland School Corporation to lease its former administration building and historic home as the new location for Westchester Township History Museum established in 1998 as an educational service of the Library.

The Library Board

The Library is governed by a seven member Board of Trustees appointed for terms of four years by five different elected bodies. Trustees serve without pay and must be residents of the library district. Three members are appointed by the Duneland School Board, with one appointment each coming from the Porter County Council, the Porter County Commissioners, the Westchester Township Advisory Board, and the Westchester Township Trustee. The Library Board is responsible for setting policy and for appointing the Library Director who is responsible for the day-to-day operations of the library.

Funding

The Library is an independent municipal corporation and as such is an independent taxing authority. The majority of the Library's revenue comes from the local property tax and is approximately 4% of the total depending upon the taxes levied by the overlapping taxing units in the township. The amount the Library can both tax and spend is limited by state law and a proposal to expend more than allowed by statute must be approved by the Porter County Council.

Westchester Public Library has a long tradition of fiscal responsibility. The Library currently has no outstanding debt. When Bethlehem Steel, the Library's largest taxpayer went bankrupt in 2001 and drastically reduced library funding, the Library Board of Trustees made the difficult choice to reduce the staff by 86% in order to keep buildings open on a reduced schedule and to continue to provide basic services and to purchase a

limited number of new books and other materials. The remaining ten staff members with the assistance of 124 community volunteers maintain the Library for the next three years until funding gradually recovered.

Services

The Westchester Public Library offers many of the usual library services citizens expect. The library acquires many new books, magazines, and many items in differing audiovisual formats such as audiobooks, music compact disks and DVD's for patrons to borrow. The library also provides both ready and in depth reference service.

Programming

The Library also provides a wide variety of cultural, educational, and recreational programs and services for children from infancy through high school including story hours and summer reading programs. There are also many offerings for adults of all ages including book discussions and reviews, film series, cooking classes, writing classes, tax help for the elderly and low income patrons, and summer concerts and film showings.

Technology

The Library is the technology center of the community. In addition to loaning eReaders preloaded with eBooks, it provides free wireless internet access for patrons at 44 public access internet workstations. There are 12 different computer classes offered on a rotating basis and one-on-one technology help desks available. Library users can also download eBooks, audiobooks, music, and language lessons from the library's content-rich website for no charge.

Community

The Library through its offering of meeting room space and through the efforts of Museum help contribute to the community's sense of identity and quality of life. Groups such as local service clubs, youth groups, and business groups such as the local Chamber of Commerce use the library's facilities to come together for various social and civic purposes.

Interlibrary Cooperation

Although there are 238 different library districts in the State of Indiana, libraries have long cooperated through reciprocal agreements to allow users from one library district to visit and borrow materials from a multitude of public libraries throughout the state. Any registered Porter County resident library user in good standing with their home library can use and borrow materials from any library in Porter County. Another service of the Library is interlibrary loan. If the library doesn't own a desired volume, it can request the book be borrowed from another library on the behalf of the local library user.

Performance Statistics – 2012

Population of Service District - 19,396

Resident Borrowers – 10,903

Nonresident Borrowers – 4,440

Patron Visits – 205,492

Holdings – books, serials, audio, videos – 176,073

Total Circulation – 370,601

Library Programs Provided – 1,227

Attendance at Library Programs – 24,068

Reference Questions Answered – 16,860

Computer Sessions – 41,276

Meeting Room Reservations – 993

Meeting Room Attendance – 12,503

Library Home Page Web Hits – 125,004