

## Libraries Need Books and More- Newsday Editorial 12/5/22

What is a library? The answer to that question is changing on Long Island and around the world.

It can mean open-air designs, podcasting studios, or spaces to participate in video conference sessions, as detailed in a recent Newsday article about changes to the Island's school libraries.

Similar shifts have happened in the region's public and higher-level academic libraries, too. That includes "makerspaces" where a patron can learn engraving or 3D printing, or the ability to check out cameras or laptops. There are privacy pods and airy spaces with picturesque coastline or street-level views. Sometimes — as with the Nassau County public library system's recently unveiled Techmobile — the library is even on the move, with an updated version of the old "bookmobile" that now brings with it Wi-Fi, iPads, video gaming, and tech help.

The idea is to meet patrons where they are, providing what they need, and the very concept of an updated bookmobile is a reminder of the fact that libraries have often changed and morphed over their history. Rooms have been reconfigured before to make way for computers. There is newer technology than pockets for checkout cards in the backs of books.

But let's not forget about those books.

Long Island's libraries of all types are wise to have updated their offerings. This is an important way to continue their vital role as community gathering places. Libraries in Nassau and Suffolk have offered homework help, food distribution, and the services of social workers and health care professionals. During the pandemic, libraries rose to the occasion with **both** virtual and in-person events.

In that process of renewal, however, we hope that books don't get shunted entirely aside. That means e-books, which were popular checkout items during COVID-19, as well as physical tomes, which remain a stubbornly useful technology in an era when young people and adults alike have seen the drawbacks of life tied to a screen. The spatial experience of browsing shelves can be just as mind-expanding as a brainstorm session in a newly-outfitted conference room. There should be ways to keep promoting books and textual education even while keeping up with modern audiences.

Some Long Island institutions are doing just that. Local history rooms or collections in libraries, including ones in Montauk and Bayport-Blue Point, collect and creatively present information that would be hard to find on Google — often, written or visual material that will fascinate locals. There also is an ongoing virtual poetry reading series focused on STEM issues, an intriguing combination that marries the ancient literary form and modern science, presented by the Thomas D. Greenley Library at Farmingdale State College. Good for the libraries, good for us all.