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Florida Library History Project

Broward County Library

Broward County Library is a consolidated library system, chartered in 1974 by the Broward County Commission. It is a division of the Community Services Department, a unit of Broward County Government.



The system started with only two municipal libraries: the Fort Lauderdale Library (consisting of three libraries, Fort Lauderdale, Riverland and Mizell and two bookmobiles) and the Hollywood Library. The fledgling system had a budget of \$1.3 million dollars.

A 1978 bond issue provided a basis for the existing library system and was preceded by a strong public relations effort. A library committee made recommendations to the county for the size of the bond issue and the number of facilities to be included. A special task force was organized to "sell" the concept. As a result of that bond issue, 13 facilities were either built or expanded. The Imperial Point Library, which opened in April 1988, was the last facility to be completed from the funding of the 1978 bond issue. From 1978 to the present, over \$60 million dollars has been spent for the construction of facilities, including the Main Library building. Four libraries were built with federal community block grants.

The Main Library opened in April 1984. This eight-story library was hailed as the symbol of a resurgence of business, government and cultural activity in downtown Fort Lauderdale. The award-winning glass-and-keystone 256,000 square-foot facility was designed by Marcel Breuer Associates of New York and Paris.

The library contains a six-story atrium, the Broward Community Technology Center, a Friends Gift Shop, Talking Book library, a 300-seat auditorium, the NationsBank Small Business Resource Center, the Florida Diagnostic and Learning Resources System Media Center, the Bienes Center for the Literary Arts and a full-service research library with over one million volumes.

Broward County Library now has 33 facilities located throughout the county. Due to increasing population and public demand, the system is expected to grow to over 40 facilities in the next 10 years, including new libraries in underserved or developing areas of the county.

Broward County Library aims to be the primary information resource for the general public and also a primary education resource for people not currently attending schools or universities. The Main Library serves as the library for the University Tower (the downtown Broward campus for Broward Community College, Florida Atlantic University and Florida International University), and for Keiser College.



The library system operates on a multi-tiered concept of service. The Main and Regional libraries provide university-level reference and research materials. The large branches offer community college-level materials and service, the medium and small branches provide materials and service appropriate for their community and the reading centers provide best-sellers and popular materials for quick visits by busy patrons.

One of the main goals of the Broward County Library is to create a system that offers top-notch public service. The library system compares favorably with other libraries in major metropolitan areas. It is the ninth largest library system in the United States, with a staff of more than 700 full and part-time employees, including 200 professional librarians.

The staff is supplemented by more than 2,000 volunteers, who donate the equivalent of 55 full-time staff positions each year. The collection has over two million items, including books, records, books-on-tape, computer software, CDs and more. The annual budget is over \$30 million.

Community members use the library and support it in many ways. Almost a million residents, about two-thirds of the county population, have library cards -- well above the national average of about forty percent.

In 1997, more than six million visits were made to Broward County libraries and almost seven million items were checked out. The reference staff answered

3,400,000 questions and over 300,000 people attended programs at the library.

In 1996, Broward County Library was named "1996-1997 Library of the Year," the highest honor a U.S. public library can receive, by Library Journal, a leading professional library magazine, and Gale Research, a major publisher of reference materials.



In a letter notifying the library of the award, Dedria Bryfonski, president and CEO of Gale Research, said, "The vision, commitment and successful implementation of Broward County Library's numerous initiatives is a sterling example of creative community service that can serve as a model for libraries nationwide to share resources throughout their communities."

In the award cover story in Library Journal, editor John Berry wrote "With myriad strategic partnerships, a respected staff development program and a 'something for everyone' approach to library service, Broward County is the model of an outstanding library."



Hiaasen, Carl. "Broward County Library turns 20." Cultural Quarterly. 8 (Winter 1994).

"A Window to the World - Broward County Library 1997 Annual Report. "The Southeast Florida Library Information Network (SEFLIN) nominated the library. "Broward County Library demonstrates an

understanding of the key principles of successful partnerships. Everyone benefits, everyone shares the success and the real winners are the community members being served," wrote Elizabeth Curry, executive director of SEFLIN.



The Library Foundation's Relationship to the Library and to Other Library Support Groups

The Broward County Commission funds the library's basic services. This covers about 86 percent of the Library budget. About 10 percent of the budget comes

from the Florida State Aid to Libraries. The total amount of State Aid is voted on by the state legislature and is divided up among Florida's public libraries according to the size and budget of the library system.

A 14-member Library Advisory Board is appointed by the county commission, two named by each commissioner. The board's purpose is to make recommendations to the library director for spending and service priorities and to recommend policy.

The Friends of the Broward County Library is a private non-profit organization. It is an umbrella group which coordinates the individual Friends of the Library groups for each facility. Local Friends groups focus their efforts on the particular library they serve.

The Friends' role is to foster public support and promote greater understanding of library services through advocacy, special programs and volunteer efforts. The Friends also provide some of the funds used to send librarians to professional conferences, and lobby for increases in State Aid.

The Broward Public Library Foundation is a private, non-profit organization devoted to raising private contributions and creating corporate partnerships for special events, projects and services.