

Expand your mind. Expand your library. Fort Bragg Library has outgrown its current space and plans to build.

Cautious, well-planned growth has been the pattern of this library since the devastating fire of 1987. At that time, The Friends of Fort Bragg Library rebuilt the library from its ashes and stocked the shelves with donated materials. Many of the Phoenix Collection books still honor the library shelves. The Friends have steered the library to its current quarters and oversaw a \$520,000 modernization in 2007. They have managed and invested their funds wisely. By 2016, the group was able to purchase the property next door to the existing library. This is the site of the proposed expansion.

Moderate growth has occurred throughout our service area, so there's an increase in potential patrons and a need to expand (and invent) services they find attractive. The basic philosophy remains the same as reported in a Fort Bragg Advocate article from 1924: *"It is probable that no other expenditure of public funds is as far reaching in its benefit as the library fund and no equal amount of money expended in a public way brings as great [a] good to as great a number of people. Numbered among the members and attendants are people from every walk in life, American and foreign born, young and old which is convincing that the Fort Bragg Free Library is fulfilling the mission for which it was built."* At this point in time, the "foreign-born" may be guests at a local b-n-b, but they are just as welcome!

"Great good to a great number:" That is our claim to fame. The stats support this claim. In 2016, the library processed 171,158 checkouts, a couple thousand less than our friends over the hill in Ukiah. Our collection is both contemporary and retrospective. The healthy balance of old and new (5,429 new items added) proves popular with long-time patrons and attracts borrowers from Sonoma and Lake Counties (35,000 items lent). One benefit of the expansion will be more space to house and display new material. This will make the collection more exciting and appeal to people who might not use the library. Our goal is to expand the range of what we offer and bring in people from every age group. The communities on the northern coast of Mendocino County deserve a larger, more engaging library.

Here's a wish-list for what might be included in our dream-library!

- 1 Quiet reading room with tables and chairs
- 2 Café and conversation area
- 3 More places to sit and a variety of seating
- 4 Children's Play and Learn area
- 5 Maker space and resources

- 6 Large room for public presentations and community events
- 7 Reservable room(s) for small group projects or individual study
- 8 Access to print/copy/scanning technology & charging station
- 9 Tech space (with flexible computer stations for group instruction and individual use)
- 10 Friends of the Library area for ongoing "Book Sales"

Any dream must be responsive to the real needs of people on the ground. Here are ten reality-based issues that matter to our users:

- 1 Coming together as a community
- 2 Safe places and activities for people of all ages
- 3 Affordable entertainment/recreation
- 4 Knowing neighbors, strong neighborhoods
- 5 Continuing/lifelong learning
- 6 Celebrating our cultures with fun events
- 7 Supporting formal education
- 8 Activities for kids after-school
- 9 Economic vitality in the community
- 10 Preparing young children for school

Accept no substitute. A Book Store is a wonderful place to lose yourself. Amazon is an unparalleled market for book lovers with money. Community Centers have activities and meeting halls. Cafes have wireless. How does the library compare to our attractive "kissing cousins?" A thriving library is more than just an amenity for people moving to or visiting the area. It should be pleasant and attractive, and strive to be as welcoming as possible. But there is more to its mission than hospitality.

A public library is essential to the well-being of a town and a resource for its growth. "Expand your mind, expand your library" touches the heart of Fort Bragg's development and the prospects of the Mendocino Coast. When a library is functional and funded-- thanks to local author Harvey Chess for this phrase--it partners with other institutions and provides information and training space to further growth. Children, teens, adults all benefit in equal measure. Here are ten ways in which the library expands our minds and helps us grow:

- 1 Promotes continued learning
- 2 Prepares children for school
- 3 Connects community with info and resources
- 4 Access to technology
- 5 Builds language and literacy skills

- 6 Provides free recreation/entertainment
- 7 Supports formal education
- 8 Center for cultural exchange
- 9 Community gathering place
- 10 Provides volunteer opportunities for youth and retirees

As a person who has worked in libraries for 30 years, I may be biased as to their importance. You decide. Does Fort Bragg Library help give the town its personality? Is it a place where democracy happens and civic pride is born? Do patrons run into people they know? Do they encounter new ideas and meet people different than themselves when they walk through the front doors? Do the voters of Mendocino County agree that libraries have value in their lives? Do they keep coming back for more? (Last year, 8,294 attended library programs in Fort Bragg. Our "door count" totaled 115,000.) Fort Bragg's population is around 8000 and the coastal communities may double that amount. In any case, some of those counted must be frequent visitors who love the library enough to return again and again. These statistics reflect the commitment of staff to patrons and help to prove that library service matters and must grow to meet the needs described above.

<http://fortbragglibrary.org/about-us/history-library/>