

Norfolk Insider

City of Norfolk, NE

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“21st Century Reference Desk”

Brian needs help writing a resume’ before he can apply for a job he’s interested in. Kay was told to attach her credentials to an email and she doesn’t even have an email address, let alone know how to attach a file. Duane is trying to track down an obscure Nebraska law and doesn’t know where to start. These requests and many more keeps Norfolk librarian Amy Fuxa hopping.



As Norfolk Public Library Reference Assistant, she isn’t the stereotypical librarian who memorizes the Dewey Decimal System and shushes people who talk above a whisper. As a reference librarian of the 21st century, she helps people navigate through a plethora of resources that includes print material, computer databases and the Internet. The only shushing she might possibly do is asking someone to turn their headphones down so the person next to them at the computer station can concentrate on the online lecture they’re listening to.

Helping others find information is Fuxa’s expertise. She might lead Duane to one of the law volumes on the library’s reference section shelf and show Kay how to get an email address. She could direct Brian to a website on resumes or to a number of databases the library subscribes to.

“A third of our materials budget is for databases. We purchase the access to those databases so that our library users can come in and use them at no cost,” said Reference Supervisor Judy Hilkemann.

The A to Z Database provides in-depth profiles of companies that investors come in to the library to use. Every day someone is at the library researching their family’s history and will access the Ancestry.com information or other geneology information the library subscribes to. People look up addresses for their Christmas card list with an extensive phone book database at the library. There’s also Consumer Reports, Crafts and Do-it-

Yourself Repair databases.

“I just helped a guy who was having trouble taking the front bumper off of an SUV and we found the diagram he needed,” Hilkemann said.

Fuxa said it’s common for her to help people research a medical diagnosis and other health information.

“They might have bent the doctor’s ear and now that they’ve processed the diagnosis they come here to learn more about it,” Fuxa said.

In the course of all this researching, the reference librarians get to know the people who come in to use the library resources.

“A person comes in wondering how to apply for a job opening that can only be accessed online and it may be awhile before they get that interview and are hired. We’re with them throughout much of that process and are happy to come across them at a local business knowing we helped them get there,” Fuxa said.

The library has a Career Transitions Database and LearningExpress Library that has practice tests for entrance exams for the US Postal Service, firefighters, commercial drivers and police officers. LearningExpress also offers practice college entrance exams and General Educational Development (GED) practice material.

Then there are people who come in to use one of the 24 Internet ready computers to communicate with their friends and family members.

“Many local people do not have a computer and/or Internet access at home. The library is the only way they can communicate with family in Europe, Mexico, South America and other parts of the world,” Fuxa said.

There’s also the boarding passes she prints off, the microfilm she helps people read, the college groups she directs to tables for projects, the 120 magazines she helps patrons peruse, and the 12 newspapers she readies for every day users.

“We’re a lifeline for a lot of people. They’re waiting at our door when we open whether it’s a fifth grader who doesn’t have Internet at home and needs to complete a project or the grandma who wants to see pictures of her new grandson in Texas. We take down the roadblocks for a lot of people to access information,” Fuxa said.

For more information about the library’s reference desk go to www.ci.norfolk.us/library or call 402-844-2100.