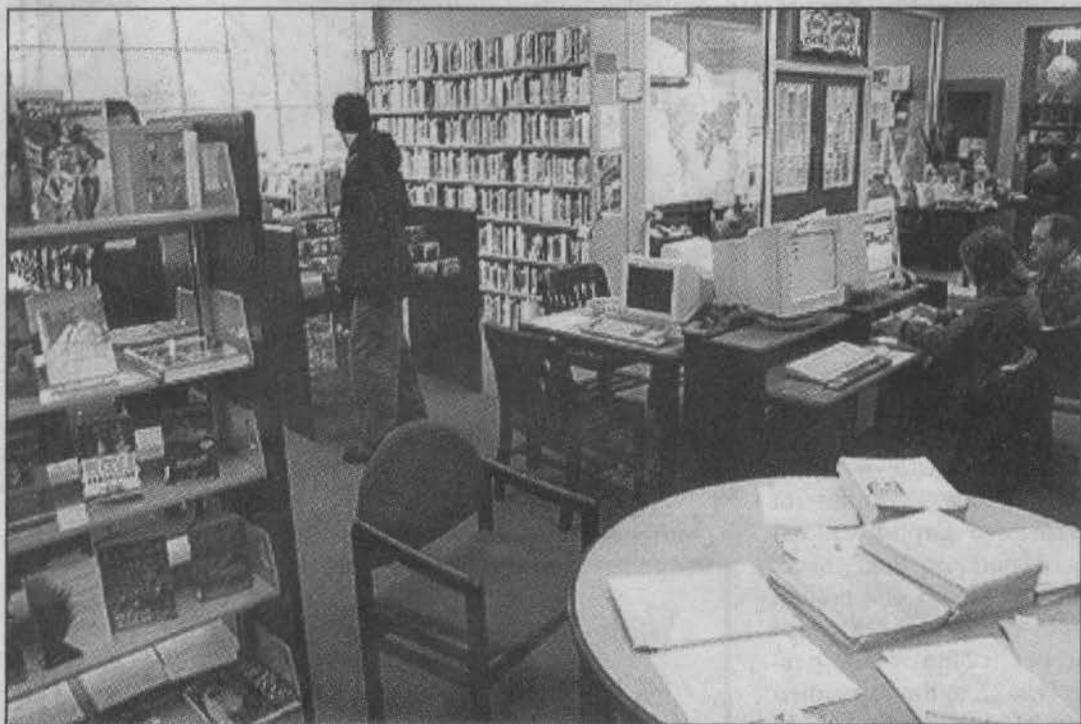


"Books are the treasured wealth of the world and the fit inheritance of generations and nations."

— Henry David Thoreau



Citizen photos: Zachary Pence

Patrons of the Madison County Public Library in Berea make their way around the cramped quarters of the facility last week.

Cramped Quarters

Heavy traffic, high circulation keeps library crowded

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DOWNTOWN — The Madison County Library's Berea location has grown quite a bit over the past few years. Stacks of boxes, office papers, unshelved books, and the pleasant, but somewhat weary, faces of the library staff (struggling to find enough uncluttered surface space to write a note or put down their coffee), strengthen the library's claim that it has outgrown its current facilities.



Workspace for library workers is hard to come by at the Madison County Public Library in Berea. The Madison County Fiscal Court built a new library in Richmond last year.

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"This is actually a good problem," says Abbie Harris, branch librarian. "It means we are a vital organization that is getting bigger and better all the time."

The Berea location, with over 7,300 "borrowers" tak-

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ing home an average of nearly 24 books a year in 2001, surpassed the borrowing rates of the Richmond location, but has not recently received a substantial upgrade to its facilities.

According to a document by Harris concerning space issues, the staff workroom is small and "sometimes dangerously crowded." The Kentucky Department for Libraries and Archives requires 150 square feet per staff mem-

ber. Berea's library only has a total of 343 square feet, and needs nearly twice that amount to meet the standards.

The cramped office conditions are not the only problem facing the staff. The library must also contend with a cramped meeting room, which cannot currently accommodate the large groups that attend family programs during the summer. For the past two years, the library has been forced to hold its family programs at places like the Berea Baptist Church.

"One of the reasons for having big summer programs is to get people in the library," Harris said. "It takes a good bit of motivation to get them all across the busy street and into the library either before or after the program."

Perhaps one of the library's biggest concerns is the basement, much of which is unsuitable for storage and, according to Harris, mostly "useless."

— turn to **LIBRARY** ♦ A2 —



Some storage rooms in the library basement have dirt floors which have led to the growth of mold.

Library in need of more space

— LIBRARY ✧ from the front — adjacent to a dirt-floored room, is completely unusable and prone to growing mold, "which visitors may find offensive," Harris said.

While the other basement storage rooms have some very limited storage capacity, they cannot be used for any other purpose, such as meetings or public stacks.

The library is also concerned that its shelves are nearly filled to capacity and to expand them would only further crowd the building leaving no room for chairs, tables, desks, or computer equipment. Each of these

aforementioned items are already competing for the limited space.

Last year over 11,200 people used the library's computers, and the one study table that the library does possess will probably be used to hold a computer.

To add to the urgency of the problem, the library's collection is growing by over 2,000 volumes per year.

"In 5 years we will have an additional 10,000 volumes to house and nowhere to put them," said Harris. Even the youth collections are packed as tightly as possible. It is also difficult for many patrons to reach the books that are stored on the

top shelves, but the library has no other choice than to use every bit of available shelving. Even areas such as the staff lounge must be used for the storage of the most popular books, which the library must keep several copies of.

Harris hopes that in years to come the library will be granted a new building, which is more suitable for the work that they do and the storage demands they must face.

If conditions at the public library concern you, please contact either Sue Hays at 623-6704 or Judge Executive Kent Clark (who could not be reached for comment) at 624-4700.