

## Chapter 5

# Lights, Camera, Library: Building Community through World Class Film

**Barbara Brattin**

*Wilkinson Public Library, USA*

### **ABSTRACT**

*Providing public library services to a resort community whose members range from service industry workers to Hollywood moguls positions Wilkinson Public Library in Telluride, CO, as an institution bridging economic disparities. Community partnerships form the foundation for free library-based film series hosted by international festivals, including the acclaimed Telluride Film Festival and eclectic Mountainfilm. Both festivals enjoy a long history in this remote western ski town, and as a result of their national success, risk being disconnected from the average local. Through year-long partnerships with the public library, both festivals are strengthening ties with their home base. In turn, the library is fulfilling its role as the great equalizer and enhancing its facility through the benevolence of the festival organizations.*

### **INTRODUCTION**

Community partnerships serve a multitude of objectives. At the heart of the partnership is the affirmation that each institution matters, both to each other and to their shared community, a recognition that forges visible goodwill and lasting commitment to shared goals. At the small town level, these partnerships can become very personal, sustaining partnering organizations through hard times and raising the visibility of important ser-

vices. For libraries with limited budgets, shared sponsorship of programs, services, or facilities is essential to innovation, but even libraries with strong financial support can dream bigger if they are willing to tap into the power of combined checkbooks, shared staff time and varied expertise.

As libraries strive to re-imagine their role in society, they are embracing new formats of the human story, whether it is in the form of dance, music, theater, lecture, film, or the written word. Just as in the past, when their roles expand they

must seek outside experts to inform their success. Nowhere is that more evident than in the arena of public programming. In the traditional library, the youth or adult services librarian creates program content; the new library model positions the librarian as facilitator of community expression. Local musicians, amateur filmmakers and community activists often find their home in our spaces, redefining the library as a vibrant community center. Isolated by the individual nature of Internet searches and telecommuter jobs, our public yearns to gather together to discuss important issues, solve common problems and renew relationships. Library programming fills this need and positions the public library as a venue for building common ground through shared experiences.

This pressure for increased library programming is met in various ways. Typical partnerships occur between like-minded organizations such as universities, K-12 schools, and bookstores. The library's role is viewed as literacy and literacy is defined by the written word. A stretch of the imagination might yield electronic books and podcasts of author visits, but literacy is still boxed into a narrow set of formats. Looking outside the organization to partner with organizations that tell the human story in other formats is met with suspicion.

The resort library experience changes all that. Our users bring uncommon tastes and high expectations to isolated locations, expecting the public library, as the largest facility in town, to fill the role of children's museums, historical societies, performance halls, or other venues filled in large cities by other organizations. Partnering with world-class organizations is common and if done well elevates the image of the public library to noteworthy, driving a different clientele to library events—the elusive affluent demographic essential for library support. While these users would typically support the library as a “greater good” in their home towns, their engagement in civic affairs is considerably reduced in places where they own a second home. Libraries that

prove their worth to this demographic not only win lasting financial support; they also leverage high-quality library service for all members of the community.

Statistics show resort libraries typically fall in the upper-range of per capita funding. In Colorado, the public libraries in the ski resorts of Aspen, Vail, and Telluride rank as the top three earners per capita (Colorado State Library). What is not considered in the statistics are the unique challenges that resort libraries face in serving both an established population struggling to survive on service industry wages and affluent property owners with fleeting interest in community services. Mixed in with residents is the seasonal pressure of demanding tourists who use library services without contributing tax income. The impact of the tourist population can be quite dramatic, increasing the number of user accounts in Telluride to more than 196 percent of the service population and placing pressure on space, technology infrastructure, children's and ready-reference services. Each group of users has its own idea of what the library should bring to them, and each must be courted to participate in an institution that can be uncomfortably inclusive.

Typically serving small service populations, the resort library is naturally intimately connected to the lives of its year-round residents and easily disconnected from tourists and second home owners. Struggling local residents and guest workers seek a sense of community aside from the tourist ebbs and flows, looking to their public library for free services that keep them afloat on service industry wages. They often spend a large part of their free time in the library to access the Internet, borrow DVDs and other entertainment, or just stay warm. The concept of the public library as the community center is familiar and natural to them. Children's services are especially valued when access to children's museums or other educational opportunities outside of school is limited or nonexistent.

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