

The Library and the Local Economy: La Porte County Public Library

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With the closing of two major manufacturers in La Porte, Allis Chalmers and American Home Foods, La Porte's unemployment level soared to more than 22 percent in late 1982 and 1983.

The library's cramped quarters prevented the library staff from holding informational sessions such as job-hunting or resume writing workshops. Instead, staff members focused upon the acquisition of helpful and useful materials on finding or changing jobs, writing resumes, practicing for educational or employment tests, choosing alternative careers, or seeking more education. Then we sought out organizations and employers who could help us connect the information available with the people who needed it.

The staff developed "Job Hunting? We Can Help!" as a representative sampling of materials. We distributed copies to Purdue—North Central Campus (where the bibliography was used in a job skills development course), the local office of the Indiana Employment Security Division, the Chamber of Commerce, the public schools, and the personnel directors of all major local employers.

One employer met the conditions of a recent labor contract with our assistance. "The terms of the contract require my plant to provide . . . job counseling and career guidance to certain employees who become unemployed. The sources and references provided by you and your staff are most appreciated."

The Jobs Information Center was established in the main reading room, and all relevant materials were housed there. A bulletin board at the main entrance announced the information and materials available and featured the daily "Help Wanted" sections from both local newspapers.

The superintendent of the public schools was especially supportive of this effort: "With the recent upturn in employment, more jobs are available but the filling of those openings, both from an employee and from an employer standpoint, takes a 'match' . . . The resources available through the La Porte County Public Library . . . are valuable tools for consummating the 'match.'"

The Chamber of Commerce commented on our service: "The library staff strives to provide meaningful information and/or assistance to people seeking jobs and career information."

Most rewarding to library staff members have been the letters from job seekers who benefited from our services. "Six months ago I was permanently laid off from my job of nine-plus years. While at times this has been very depressing, it has also turned out to be a blessing in disguise. The "blessing" — I have discovered the library . . . The services available are outstanding whether you are merely seeking entertainment or are researching methods for a successful job search." This letter points out that this library is not only a resource for job-related information but also a source of entertainment and information for all the citizens of this community.

The economic situation faced by many La Portians prompted them to use the library's materials for "how-to-do-it" manuals, low-cost home repairs, stretching available dollars, etc. As a result the circulation for the library system increased by 9.5 percent in 1983 over 1982, and 14.5 percent in 1984 over 1983.

It is our opinion that the library's efforts to aid the unemployed were successful. And that our efforts to aid the community in difficult economic times will continue to have a positive effect on our community and its citizens.