spark

Fresh Perspectives

A look at Anythink from multiple angles
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A Letter from the Director

“If a nation expects to be ignorant and free in a state of civilization, it expects what never was and never will be. An informed citizenry is at the heart of a dynamic democracy.”

— Thomas Jefferson

Last month, I attended a town hall meeting hosted by State Representative Steve Lebsock at Anythink Huron Street. The parking lot was over capacity and the meeting room was overflowing with at least 50 people actively engaged in conversation. I can’t think of anything more important than our community engaged in civic discourse at our libraries.

The conversation was lively and, despite the array of topics, the questions kept returning to pending gun control legislation. The room was nearly evenly divided in opinion. Although the topic brings out passion in all of us, the dialogue was civil. People were listening to each other intently, and treated each other with respect. My reason for attending was to simply listen to the conversation, to understand the issues of our community. However, toward the end, I felt compelled to make a closing remark. Libraries are the most democratic of institutions. Libraries are places to learn, and for citizens to inform themselves on issues. This is our responsibility to actively engage in self-governance. It is all of our responsibility to help guide the conversation, as well.

I suggested that we elevate the conversation to a discussion starting with shared values. I think we all value a safe community and creating safe places for our children to go to school. I think it is our responsibility as adults to create safe places for our children and each other. If we start the dialogue with our values, then I propose that our conclusions and actions support our values. One of the key questions about safety is how to build that sense of community, one in which people know one other, regularly connect with each other and have a common sense of responsibility for each other. These communities are places that thrive. They are places where people want to live. Libraries are places that can support that sense of community, those bonds that make it safe to have respectful dialogue about important issues.

When we see ourselves as members of a community, the responsibility shifts, the dialogue changes. The whole is greater than the sum of its parts.

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Getting Global

A Swedish perspective of Anythink

On a March day in sunny Colorado, staff at Anythink Brighton help kids navigate the library on a busy afternoon. Children create their own baseball mascots in The Studio. Students of all ages learn about life inside of an egg as part of the Anythink embryology program. Teens huddle around the computers to laugh and catch up on after-school chat, and adults browse row after row of books to check out and read.

On the other side of the word, in Sol lentuna, Sweden, a suburb of Stockholm, the Biblioteken i Sollentuna (Sollentuna Libraries) are closed for the evening after a long day of community-based learning, not dissimilar to what customers at Anythink Brighton experience.

What is it that these two libraries from different countries and different cultures could learn from one another? A group of Swedish librarians wanted to find out.

"It’s part of our culture to look at each other," says Anders Olsson, head of Sollentuna Libraries. "[Our libraries] are looking at each other and we’ve seen that we are so like each other that we can’t separate."

By most American standards, Swedish libraries are progressive and innovative. They seek to serve their communities with interactive programming and tech resources. Whether it’s a children’s puppet theatre production on trolls, a sex education program for young teens or an international lecturer on the topic of free speech, this library system is not afraid to shake things up for their customers. Still, Olsson and his fellow Sollentuna Libraries team members wanted to seek out fresh ideas from outside their own system. That’s where Anythink came in.
In 2011, Solletuna Libraries Department Head Peter Svaerdh was invited to the Axiell library symposium in London. On the schedule was a presentation from Anythink Director Pam Sandlian Smith. Svaerdh couldn’t attend, but someone involved with the symposium sent him a link that created a spark. It was a YouTube video created during the grand opening of Anythink Brighton. The reaction was a positive one.

“Just after I watched it, I told Anders, ‘I’m going on a study trip to Denver to look at this thing called Anythink,’” Svaerdh says. “It’s quite amazing.”

And that’s exactly what he did. After applying to the appropriate municipality for international exchange, Svaerdh, Olsson and fellow Sollentuna Libraries Department Head Susanna Ohlstroem were granted the resources to visit Anythink.

The three guests spent two full days with Anythink staff, learning the ins and outs of the Anythink story and the organization’s goals, philosophies and practices. After numerous meetings, observations and tours, the Swedish visitors found themselves at Anythink Brighton, witnessing the busy operations of the library whose YouTube video had first prompted them to fly across the ocean in search of inspiration. What they discovered was a kindred spirit and many ideas.

From big-picture concepts like Anythink’s focus on creativity and core values in human resources to smaller details like placing Sudoku puzzles near comfortable chairs, the Sollentuna guests recited a list of ideas that they are considering implementing in their own library.

For Olsson, it was the implementation of The Studio, Anythink’s creative learning labs aimed at providing tools and technology to help teens explore. For Svaerdh, it was the staff, which he referred to as positive influencers who take the time to share with both children and adults. And for Ohlstroem, it was WordThink, the system by which Anythink organizes its collection in an intuitive way that makes it easy to discover new resources.

“I am totally blown away by WordThink,” says Ohlstroem. “I’m going to dream about that.”

Though these and other ideas were exchanged, it was the camaraderie experienced by both Anythink staff and their Swedish guests that seemed to linger at the end of their visit. This connection even prompted a discussion regarding future exchanges and collaborations for the two organizations to continue to learn from one another.

“It’s really great to see a library in another culture that thinks like we do,” noted Svaerdh.

Olsson echoed Svardh’s sentiment: “The more we hear, the more we have in common and that’s interesting to see that we can go halfway around the globe to find a library that works similar to us.”

At the core of that thinking is not just providing programs and resources, but providing a place for the community to interact.

“The meaning of it is that the library is yours,” notes Olsson. “You should be able to use it exactly how you want to use it.”

“It’s really great to see a library in another culture that thinks like we do,” noted Svaerdh.
ANYTHINK YORK STREET: A new public library in Thornton, Colo.

On June 1, 2013, Anythink will open the doors of a brand new public library. Located on the Mapleton Public School’s Skyview campus, east of I-25 in Thornton, Colo., Anythink York Street will serve community members of all ages with our innovative service model that emphasizes creativity and learning through participation. Want to know more? Here’s the lowdown:

LOCATION
Anythink York Street
8990 York Street
Thornton, CO 80229

HOURS STARTING JUNE 1
Tues. and Thur., 11 am-7 pm
Wed., Fri. and Sat., 9:30 am-5:30 pm

• Anythink York Street is a public library. We invite all of our customers to check out this beautiful new facility, complete with the same creative Anythink vibe you’ve come to know and love.

• In order to facilitate this new endeavor, Anythink Washington Street will permanently close on April 12, 2013. Located less than a mile away, Anythink York Street will serve the same community in eastern Thornton with enhanced facilities, more computers, stronger Internet bandwidth, a larger collection, and complete with the same caring staff members (not to mention Chester, the bearded dragon).

Please be on the lookout for further details, including information on our grand opening celebration!

The fireplace at Anythink York Street.

New Books: Check ’Em Out
We’ve got great new titles in April for children and adults at Anythink.

CHILDREN
• Steam Train, Dream Train by Sherri Duskey Rinker, illus. by Tom Lichtenheld
• The Dark by Lemony Snicket, illus. by Jon Klassen
• Tea Rex by Molly Idle
• Fancy Nancy: Fanciest Doll in the Universe by Jane O’Connor, illus. by Robin Preiss Glasser
• That Is Not a Good Idea! by Mo Willems

ADULT
• It’s All Good by Gwyneth Paltrow and Julia Turshen
• Unsinkable by Debbie Reynolds
• Don’t Go by Lisa Scottoline
• Taking Eve by Iris Johansen
• Let’s Explore Diabetes with Owls by David Sedaris
For Rangeview Library District board president Kay Riddle, libraries are more than just a place to check out books – they’re an integral part of the community. And she should know. Riddle has been a champion of our local libraries for decades – first as a customer, then as a part-time librarian in 1969 and eventually as Rangeview Library District board president. Riddle, whose professional career has encompassed everything from politics to running a baseball camp for at-risk, inner-city boys, is retiring this year from her tenure as a board trustee. Though she’ll always remain an Anythinker (she still visits Anythink Huron Street two to three times a week), Riddle recently sat down with us to share her parting words of advice, reflections on the evolution of libraries, and why print books will always have value.

Q: What was it like during the transition from the Adams County Public Library system to Anythink?

KR: Adams County Library was your average library system – Dewey Decimal System, the whole thing – and it was underfunded. Then we passed the mill levy, became a district and brought Pam [Sandlian-Smith, Anythink Director] on board, and everything just exploded. Pam was so full of ideas. From being probably the worst [funded] library in the district, we’re now in front. We’re the cutting edge, and it’s been wonderful to see and be a part of.

Q: In what ways do libraries need to evolve in order to meet the needs of their communities?

KR: I don’t think books will ever go away. There’s something about sitting with a book in your lap. But I think that the demand for DVDs, CDs, audio books and computers will continue to grow. So many people don’t have access to computers or the Internet, and I think that’s a really important niche that we fill. I also think it’s important to reach out to minority communities as they move into your cities, and to have books available in their language and have people in our libraries that speak their language. This way, we can really reach out and get them used to using libraries, get them used to having their children use libraries. It can only be good – for libraries and for them.

Q: How does Anythink fit into this library revolution?

KR: I think Anythink is leading the way, but it’s also part of a movement. If libraries want to stay alive, they have to change and grow. You can see that where they are changing, they’re still viable and part of the community. And you can also see where they aren’t changing – they’re closing their doors and their patrons are falling off. We’ve got to change. We’re like everybody else in that we’ve got to keep up with the world. And Anythink has been out ahead of that.

Q: Did you hear that the first all-digital public library is in the works?

KR: That will be interesting to see. I love my iPad. I go nuts if I can’t find it, but I still like sitting down with a book – to have something in your lap that you can underline or make notes in the margins of, and something you can treasure and have forever. Besides, you can’t read digital in the bathtub, so I think that’s a big plus for paperbacks.

Q: What advice do you have for future Anythinkers?

KR: I think the only advice is the same advice I gave Pam when she came on board, which is: Don’t be afraid to try anything. The worst it can do is fail and then you go and try something else. I don’t want to be on the bleeding edge, but I always want our libraries to be on the cutting edge, to be trying new things. I think that comes with the people that we’re hiring now. They have that adventurous spirit, and I want that spirit of adventure to stay in the library.

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Kay Riddle at her “home away from home,” Anythink Huron Street
Teen Scene

A look at Anythink through the eyes of one local teen

What does Anythink look like to your average teenager? Is it a place filled with books and magazines? Is it somewhere to catch up with your friends and make new ones? Try a new hobby? Create new things to take home or give away as gifts? How about a place filled with computers and Internet access for homework, games and social media? Try: all of the above.

“It’s a great place to learn new things,” says Anythink Brighton customer Victoria Rose Shannon. “It’s open. You have books to choose from and more than what’s at the school library. When you go to Anythink, there’s everything. It’s mind-blowing.”

Shannon is a 13-year-old student at Overland Trail Middle School in Brighton, Colo., and a frequent customer at Anythink Brighton. A typical teenage girl whose hobbies range from drawing to cooking, Shannon visits the library nearly every day after school. It’s there that she hangs out with friends, checks out new books and explores a number of programming options available, especially those that are more craft and artistic-based. In fact, on the day we caught up with Shannon, she was showing off the tile photos she had created, featuring none other than pop star sensation Justin Bieber. She plans on giving the photo tiles to a friend who she says has “Bieber Fever.”

As for her favorite band, not pictured on the tiles she’s holding?

“I like Skrillex,” she says.

Q: Do you have a favorite Anythink moment?

KR: I have a couple, but one is the day we opened this library [Anythink Huron Street]. Many of my children and grandchildren came, and they were just so excited because most of them had not been in a library for years. They grew up in a library but they’d gotten away from it as they’d grown older and got busy and married and started raising children. And they were just awed by how beautiful it was and how convenient. I still visit [Anythink Huron Street] two to three times a week. I just love it and people tell me all the time how much they enjoy it. The only complaint I ever hear is that there’s not enough parking on Saturday morning. But I think that means that we’re doing something right.

Q: You’re retiring from your position as a Rangeview Library District board president. What would you like to share with us about your experience?

KR: Over all of the years that I’ve been involved, it’s been such a joy and it’s because of the people. People make things work. You can have all of the books or all of the gorgeous libraries in the world, but if you don’t have the right people it’s not going to work. We’ve always been so lucky to have the right people, and that’s been the part of it that’s been so wonderful. It’s like a family.
The tiles created by Shannon are part of the many teen-oriented programs available at The Studio. The Studio is a place where Anythink encourages teens to explore their creativity using a variety of tools and innovative programming. With two creativity labs, located at Anythink Brighton and Anythink Wright Farms, teens are able to partner with community members to further their knowledge and get a first-hand look at real-life application of creative endeavors.

Game Design Workshop
Saturday, April 6, 1-4 pm
This is a must for all teens that love video games. Students will learn the process of game design from multiple perspectives, including game system elements and team roles and responsibilities.

Anythink Wright Farms
5877 E. 120th Ave.
Thornton, CO 80602
303-405-3200

Growing Vegetables on the Eastern Plains
Saturday, April 20, 1 pm
How’s your green thumb? Join plant expert Jeri Cretti as she helps us plant, care for and harvest a successful vegetable garden.

Anythink Bennett
495 7th Street
Bennett, CO 80102
303-405-3231

Immigration: What You Need to Know
Wednesday, May 22, 10-11 am
Join McGuire Law to learn about the developments in immigration reform. Additionally, attendees can learn the ins and outs of how to apply for legal status on behalf of a spouse or family member. A Spanish language interpreter will be available. No registration required.

Anythink Brighton
327 E. Bridge Street
Brighton, CO 80601
303-405-3230

For a complete listing of Anythink events, visit anythinklibraries.org.

When you’re done reading SPARK, share with a friend, give back to a staff member, or recycle.