

Raising Readers

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Highland Park Branch Library



and tables get pushed aside for Saturday Live!, a weekly children's literacy-based program that often doesn't even include reading, but does allow librarians and performers to connect the day's entertainment—maybe the Minnesota Zoomobile, a traditional Norwegian fiddler, or a Mongolian circus star—to library opportunities.

"Ten years ago, we might have said, 'That program better be about reading,'" Kolb Peterson says. "But now, if the University of Minnesota Raptor Center is here, we just make sure to have all our books about falcons, eagles, hawks, and other raptor-

related topics on the tables. By the time the program is over, the books will be gone...In the past, we've basically said to kids, 'We're librarians. We know what's best for you,' when we should have been saying, 'Here's what we offer, what do we have that applies to you and your interests?'"

A similar refrain is echoed at the new Minneapolis Central Library scheduled to open later this month. The children's area of Cesar Pelli's \$125 million creation is a bright, open space walled on two sides by twenty-foot windows looking onto Washington Avenue and Nicollet Mall. "Gone

are the days of being shushed," says Minneapolis Public Libraries communications manager Karen Louise Boothe as she shows off the area. "This will be used for story times with kids of all ages, and will be open for families to just play together."

A similar parent-child playtime ethos is behind the changes underway in story times throughout the metro. The traditional model of one adult with a book reading to a group of temporarily subdued kids has evolved into dynamic, interactive sessions where the focus is as much on educating parents as it is about introducing kids to books.

"Every adult-child pair has the same book our librarian has," explains Caitlin Cowan, a Minneapolis Public Library early literacy specialist. "The facilitator might have a doll or a stuffed animal in their lap, and they model the process. We want to show parents how to bring these literacy ideas into their homes."

As kids begin reading independently, book groups pick up where story times leave off. "By introducing the book group concept at an early age, kids will come back year after year," says Dana Bjerke, youth services librarian for Hennepin County Library's Ridgedale branch, which will launch book groups for first- and second-graders this summer.

Getting Teens Involved

Libraries are also discovering creative ways to reach teens, a population that hasn't been the easiest to connect with. "In libraries, we often like loners," says Kolb Peterson. "We haven't, in the past, been willing to deal with healthy teen behavior."

Determining what teens want in a library has meant taking time to ask them. With the look of a funky high-rise loft, the Teen Central area of the Minneapolis Central Library came together from the input of student government leaders from Minneapolis schools. A teen advisory board has since gone on a 200-CD shopping spree to select items for the area and continues to suggest graphic novels, video games, movies, and more.