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Exhibits Encourage Interest and Build Community at Westerville Public Library

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"One eye sees, the other feels," according to artist Paul Klee. When artists, collectors and organizations set up displays at the Westerville Public Library, they want to catch the eye of library visitors as well as create a feeling of involvement. With more than sixty displays booked each year, the community is using its library to impact audiences of every age and interest. Through their displays, exhibitors are becoming co-creators of the library's visual space.

Displays at the library have drawn the attention of lookers since the 1970s when macramé and counted cross stitch were on view. Today, meeting room walls can display 75 works of art, the youth area accommodates displays in two showcases, and the library mallway houses several sizes of museum-quality acrylic cases. Even the library's bike rack has been a display spot. The local history center houses numerous collections. Souvenir keepers, hobbyists, history buffs, artisans and special-cause advocates take ownership in their library when they share their possessions with the community by using our display areas.



Youth librarian Susan Carr accepts reservations from children wishing to place their collections in the flat and tall showcases in the youth area. There is a waiting period of one year due to the popularity of these spots. Susan recounts, "The standouts among the collections we've had on display are Pez dispensers; 642 Dum Dum lollipop wrappers (A quote from the mother: 'It is every child's dream to collect them and mail away for a prize. So, for all the moms who have said "No," here it is!'); animal bones ('I've collected them almost all of my life and I want to show them to people.');

clovers; beautiful Welsh love spoons; and historic marbles." LEGO, Star Wars/Star Trek, Beanie Babies, dinosaurs, rocks and displays from area art teachers are also popular. Children look forward to seeing their collections on display and are proud to send their friends, family and neighbors to view it, increasing community interest in the library.

Often, the exhibits volunteered by adults are collections spanning many years. Nina Thomas in community services accepts reservations from adults for the mallway cases. She lists the most eye-catching collections as 1960s Hot Wheels, trolls, teacups and teapots, action figures, artwork and quilts. When an owner comes into the library to set up the display, we see this as an opportunity for collaboration between

library staff and the collector.



Groups wishing to raise awareness for their cause use the showcases to promote upcoming fundraisers, build membership or simply share information. Organizations whose members have made impactful displays with their art, home décor and needlework include Together With Important Goals (TWIG), groups of women who display handmade crafts promoting their annual bazaar; Youth to Youth International whose Thank Goodness I'm Female (TGIF) display of phrases, art and photos exemplify life solutions for teen girls; and the Smocking Guild's stunning array of baby dresses and gowns that tempt smockers to join the group. An environmental group parked a specially painted bike outside the library to mark Earth Day. By welcoming displays for a variety of causes, the library fosters a spirit of openness and opportunity.

The library's local historian Beth Weinhardt knows firsthand the impact of history-themed displays, as she oversees the layout of more than a dozen cases in the two-story history center adjacent to the library. Beth's favorite displays by the public include old wedding photographs collected by a woman who scoured antique shops and secondhand stores, models by the shipwrights who built their own display unit to fit in the case, and vintage Christmas catalogs that set a festive tone in the mallway. The collaboration between the library and the community can produce a special display such as the collection of personally-owned cameras loaned to our local history center and currently on display.



Professional artists, photographers, art instructors, school children and art associations have hung their masterpieces in the meeting room since its opening in 1981. The brass hanging system is user-friendly and popular with artists who reserve the wall space to show their works to both browsers and potential buyers. Proud children bring their parents to the library to view the annual Celebrate the Arts exhibit organized each April by the city schools and arts council. The library hosts the reception. A community bond has developed with the art teachers and the library.

By inviting the community to create a visual presence in our building through their displays, the library is engaging collectors and artists of all ages to feel ownership and commitment in their library.