

Ohio Libraries and Hurricane Ike

When Hurricane Ike blew through Ohio on September 14, 2008 many homes and businesses were damaged and thousands were left without power for days. Fortunately, most libraries were spared and as a result quickly became hubs for community members seeking light, reading materials, internet access, and power for charging cell phones & laptops. Many libraries remained open for extra hours to better serve the increase in visitors.

The State Library asked public library staff throughout Ohio to share their stories about the impact of Hurricane Ike in their communities and libraries. The following information is a compilation of their responses.

Troy-Miami County Public Library

In Troy we saw a large increase in the number of wireless laptop users. Most needed to plug in their computer and usually a cell phone as well, so we moved some study carrels closer to outlets and outfitted each with a power strip. It seemed to be appreciated.

Rachelle Miller

Director

Troy-Miami County Public Library

937.339.0502 ext. 16

Delaware County District Library

While we were very fortunate to escape any damage to our buildings, like most of the state we were without power, but only for a day at the Main Library, 2 days at one branch and 5 days at another. Our Main Library reopened on Tuesday morning, and we were flooded with customers, especially those with laptops who were accessing their email and other necessary information from the Internet using our wireless connection. There were even customers waiting for outlets to plug in their laptops! Our computer room, a popular destination on "normal" days had an unusually long waiting list throughout the day.

We also had hundreds of customers checking out books, magazines, as well as browsing newspapers and so forth in the building because much of Delaware County was without power longer than the library was without power. Since schools were canceled Monday and Tuesday, parents, teens, school-aged children and preschoolers also made good use of the library facility and materials.

To me, having so many people turn to the library for help during the power outages was an affirmation that the public understands and appreciates that public library is an important cornerstone in our community.

Mary Jane Santos, Director

Delaware County District Library

Westerville Public Library

The Westerville Public Library was the scene of hundreds of residents who looked to the library as the place to charge their cell phones, use the Wi Fi for their laptops, and chat with others without electricity after 75 mph winds from the remnants of hurricane Ike that hit Westerville yesterday. The library's snack counter sold record amounts of coffee and cookies to visitors who huddled with their computers at tables that ordinarily held displays of books and other services.

We took so many inquiries that we altered our telephone welcome message to reflect the fact that we were open – with electricity and Internet access! They came with their laptops – and sat on the floor at times.

Photo: Filip Zafirov finds a spot near a drinking fountain to plug in his laptop and work. His mini work surface is usually a chair-side table in the reading room.



Our Library was truly the hub of the community during that time of hardship!

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Stark County District Library

Stark County was hit hard with power outages. As many of our residents also get their drinking water from wells, this presented additional problems. The Stark County District Library locations were very busy last week, with patrons using our WiFi, using our facilities, and charging all of the accessories necessary to modern life – we had many laptops and cell phones plugged into our outlets. We received one particularly grateful email from a patron who is self-employed – our wireless internet access allowed him to stay in business last week while his home was without power.

Linda Dahl
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Brown Memorial Library

Although our county was hard hit, especially our small town of Lewisburg, the library was blessedly spared. Power outage only occurred for us for a period of about 8 hours. During the outage, we experienced a huge influx of computer usage, as well as folks coming in to charge their cell phones. Our community as a whole worked together by opening their churches and homes to those in need hosting free dinners and water/shower availability.

We're fortunate that our historic building had no damage. We have a large tree in front (planted 1936) that miraculously stayed up.

Dianna Oda
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Chillicothe and Ross County Public Library

Our Main Library and one branch were closed only one full day due to power outages. The rest of the library system stayed open, as our computer network is based at another branch with a back-up generator. No flooding and no library damage, as there was absolutely no rain associated with the Ike winds in our area.

Jennifer Thompson, Director, Chillicothe and Ross County Public Library

Mansfield/Richland County Public Library

While our library system was not seriously impacted by Hurricane Ike, we do provide an Information and Referral (I&R) service to our residents every day. We have fielded a number of calls from individuals looking for emergency housing and perishable food replacement assistance. As partners with our county Job and Family Services office, we are able to explain the eligibility and application process to receive assistance through the Governor's disaster declaration process.

Terry Carter, I&R Librarian, First Call of Richland County
Mansfield/Richland County Public Library
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Sabina Public Library in Clinton County

We were most fortunate here at Sabina Public Library in Clinton County.

Our power was only off from 3 pm Sunday the 14th until 10 am Monday the 15th. We opened at 11 am and were very busy. Patrons were mostly having computer withdrawal and many who normally did not use our computers were using our internet to pay bills. We had patrons using our facility to charge their phones and computers. We still have patrons who have yet to once again have power. We consider ourselves to be very lucky.

Bonnie Starcher, Director Sabina Public Library in Clinton County

Wright Memorial Public Library

Wright Memorial Public Library just lost one tree on the front lawn, but power was out from Sunday afternoon, Sept. 14 until Thursday morning, Sept. 18. Lots of people still didn't have power restored for a week or more. The library extended its hours on Monday, Sept. 22 until 10 p.m. so students who still didn't have power would have a place to study. I asked for help from my fellow Rotarians to provide additional adult supervision that evening.



Here is a photo of Oakwood Rotarian, Ted O'Connor, volunteering in our AV department that evening.

Ann Snively, Director
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Westlake Porter Public Library

Fortunately, we had no damage or power outage here at the library. However, our staff tells me we had several people coming in to use the library because they had no power at home. One family (a mother and daughter, at least) actually said they had hung out here for several nights because they had no power at home, and this way the 6th grade daughter had more time for homework (had light until 9 p.m.!). We also had a couple individuals come in to use our public PCs because their power was off. One mentioned that he had to pay some bills online. A large number in Westlake wound up without power for several days. Most people got theirs back on Wednesday, but I know of at least one who didn't get her power back until 2 a.m. on Friday. By the way, WPPL is an independent library - not affiliated with Cuyahoga County Public Library.

Elaine Willis, Public Relations Associate, Westlake Porter Public Library
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Public Library of Cincinnati and Hamilton County

The Main Library sustained damage to some flashing, and our large exterior sign at the Price Hill Branch blew away. The Main Library & 40 branch libraries had landscaping and tree damage but otherwise remained unscathed. On Monday we opened the Main Library and 21 branches on time. By Tuesday, 5 additional branches opened, and on Wednesday 5 more were opened. At 8:47 a.m. on September 18, staff received an email update--All branches now have electric and are fully operational.

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Here are some comments from branch managers:

Mt. Washington Branch - We were very fortunate that we did not sustain any damage to our building and we had power for our Monday morning opening. We had many, many regular customers instinctively turn to us for recreational reading materials as well as for Internet access. People who typically use their own computers were very glad to be able to have Internet access through the Library to pay bills, do their banking, and contact family members. The number of people taking advantage of our WIFI service jumped dramatically. We also became a place where people could recharge their cell phones, and at one point I was actually managing whose turn it was to use our electrical outlets.

One of our regular customers, Jim Montgomery, made this slide show of the damage in our area and we gave our customers the web address so they could view it and share it with out of town friends and relatives. All of the photos were taken very near our Library. WWW.photo-jim.com/ike
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Loveland Branch - We had lots of people recharging laptops and cell phones, asking for internet access, checking their email, using wifi, and just spending time in the building. Nothing spectacularly different from usual, but clearly people do think of us as a useful community resource. People also really seemed to enjoy having someone to tell their story to as well. What I find interesting is why they thought of us--news stories, or just knowing that we're always here?
Joan Luebering, Loveland Branch Manager

Clifton Branch - We only lost power at the branch for about 20 minutes on Sunday while we were open - so we were a full service library pretty much the entire time. I have to say - we were quite the place to be the early part of the week. The phones rang constantly (inquiring about power and computer capabilities), our computers were booked solid and the children's room looked like an airport waiting room with people using laptops, charging cell phones and just hanging out (add to this - the additional chaos of students out of school - and you can quote me on this - it was a zoo!
Jenny Gomien, Clifton Branch Manager

Mariemont Branch - Our branch was fortunate to not lose power during the hours we were open so we could provide people with access to the Internet and power for recharging computers and phones. One of the interesting aspects of this was all the business men who came into the branch to check their email--it wasn't just college students charging up! We were very busy helping people who were new to the library and I think it was a very positive experience for most of them. It's too bad our free WiFi was not in place, yet, as many thought they could access the Internet with their laptops.

We printed out information about school closings, food safety and Duke Energy contact numbers. Also, many people came in to the branch just to have light to read the paper! All and all, though a dire time for the community, Ike showed how important the library is as an information resource.
Mary Sanker, Mariemont Branch Manager

Miami Township Branch - Julie forwarded this to me and asked me to send my Storm Assistance Document that I made for our branch and that I forwarded on to the Branch Public Desk email accounts. This document can be tailored for the different locations that may be having other services provided. For instance, in the Symmes area the Whole foods store was giving out ice, so including that on the form would be helpful to those residents but not to ours. I just check online each day with the different news stations and listened to NPR for any additional information that would be helpful to our patrons. Attached you'll find the document that we are currently using for patrons to have important phone numbers and information during the recovery time of the storm. Thanks, Anna Hancock Children's Librarian, Miami Township Branch <<see attachment - StormAssistance.doc>>

Monfort Heights Branch - We lost a beautiful maple tree that had been planted by the Jack and Jill 4-H Club the same year the branch opened, in 1971. The storm broke the tree in half and we lost our best spot for reading outside on nice days. Several customers are missing it, especially the teens who used to listen to story time under the tree when they were children.

Our power was out Monday and we were closed, but upon reopening Tuesday we were swamped with people needing to use the Internet and charge cell phones. Several area residents were without power through Thursday. One of our student assistants, Billy Getz, had the idea to create "charging stations" for customers needing to charge their cell phones and laptops. He rearranged the tables to bring them closer to the outlets, brought out spare extension cords, and we were able to provide several access points for people to "plug in". We heard many "thank-yous" and words of appreciation from customers, and it was great to be able to provide support for them. I was very proud of Billy for his idea and for taking the initiative to find a way to help those in need.

Aimee Pennington, Branch Manager
Monfort Heights Branch Library
513.369.4472 513.369.2869 voicemail

Oakley Branch - Several Oakley patrons told us they were reading books by candlelight just like Abraham Lincoln. Another patron was in the middle of watching a DVD from the library which was stuck in her machine for the next week. Jeanne Rettig, Oakley Branch Manager

Madisonville Branch - We did not suffer any damage or power outage but each day we opened our doors to customers filling our steps wishing to use the internet and our printers. We also saw new faces because customers could not get immediate satisfaction with returning their items to a branch without power so they returned to us. Our regulars came in to charge their cell phones and laptops, not a service we provide regularly but one I'm glad we could offer. Many lively conversations were held with our customers over the topics of who had power, who did not, and what everyone was doing for breakfast, lunch, and supper. I'm hoping the people who found us during the emergency will not forget us and continue to discover what else we have to offer.

Lisa Salyers
Branch Manager, Madisonville Branch
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Wyoming Branch - The Wyoming Branch was one of the very few businesses in Wyoming to have power during the black out. Wyoming Ave was the only street in Wyoming with power. Residents were so appreciative that they could come in to charge cell phones and use their laptops. In fact patrons found outlets that we never knew we had. We had people sitting in every corner conducting their business on their laptops. We saw many people we had never seen before and we were so happy to be of service. Although the branch was a bit chaotic at times, the staff all felt that this was what customer service was really all about, being there to help with whatever was needed.

We also had many stories of DVDs stuck in players and we joked with them about hearing that story before and of course were very lenient about removing fines.

Eileen Horvath

Manager, Wyoming Branch

Public Library of Cincinnati and Hamilton County

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Madeira Branch - We were inundated with people trying to use our computers and trying to get power for charging laptops and cell phones. We had many first time users during this period. On Tuesday and Wednesday we struggled to find enough electrical outlets for people to plug in to. We also kept in touch with City Hall and delivered timetable updates about repairs to local residents. Kathy Kennedy-Brunner, Madeira Branch Manager

Westwood Branch - We've had customers in daily telling us they still don't have power and asking to use the Internet and to charge their cell phones. We've been providing reference service for telephone numbers for whom to contact regarding tree removal, insurance claims, etc. We're getting lots of requests to fax grocery receipts to Hamilton County Job and Family Services and it's been very busy! Lots of families are checking out books, but forgoing the DVDs since they "don't need power to read books!" Although it has been tragic, in some ways it has brought our community together. We've seen a lot of new faces and it's been great to truly feel like we are VITAL to our community!

Kathy Bach

Branch Manager

Westwood Branch Library

Public Library of Cincinnati and Hamilton County

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Anderson Branch - While most of Anderson Township lost power, Anderson branch opened as usual on Monday morning. It was an eye-opener how many people came to the library just to use the Internet or their laptops. Our circulation didn't show it, but hundreds of people were here throughout the week to use the technology. For the first time ever, all 25 internet computers were in use every day. We also had customers tell us they were grateful just to be somewhere with lights, somewhere they could sit and relax for a while.

Patty Peterson, Anderson Branch Manager

Carnegie Public Library

We had many calls to the library asking if we were open, had power and were our computers working, in that order. We were open, did have power and the internet. Many came to use the internet. It was a week before power was restored to some parts of the city.

Melissa Percic

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Important Information Regarding Storm Damage

Still without Power? Trees on a power line? Call: Duke Energy at 513-651-4182 or 1-800-543-5599

Broken Meter Boxes? If the meter box or weather head (part of the fixture that connects the service/supply line to the meter box) to a customer's home is damaged or pulled away from the building, customers need to contact a licensed electrician for repairs and their local county inspection office for an inspection. Customers should turn off their main breaker until damage is repaired.

Need help with food or storm costs? Call Hamilton County Emergency assistance at 513-263-8200. County Commissioners say the emergency declaration remains in effect and probably will stay that way until the end of the week. The county is handing out food stamps to those who qualify and are asking FEMA to reimburse them for storm related costs.

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