

Robert D. Jackson

The Montclair Public Library and I have a wonderful, life-long relationship and that relationship has brought me untold hours of joy, enlightenment and inspiration.

In my youth, it was my homework center and the place that I could while away the hours during the summer in a comfortable chair with a great book. The librarians “adopted” me and ensured that a healthy supply of the history books that I loved were on hand.

During the summers, the Library was a home away from home for me while my mother worked. I could be found at one of four places: Glenfield Park, Nishuane Pool, Montclair Public Library, or home. I loved playing sports in the park and swimming but I equally loved the “cozy confines” of the Library. The paper, perforated library card was the key to a limitless world of learning and fun. The card catalog was a treasure trove of books that I couldn’t afford to buy.

As an adult, I’ve discovered that while the Library makes me feel special, I am far from unique. The Library is a nurturing, enriching institution for everyone it touches. I am in awe of its ability to enhance the intellectual capacity and cultural awareness of so many. The Montclair Public Library is an Equal Opportunity Enhancer” like no other.

The Montclair Public Library’s role as a meeting place and “community center” is vital. My children and their friends today make great use of the Library for research projects and group studies. The Young Adult Room is an ideal gathering spot. Furthermore, my wife and I have used the Library to host meetings of community service groups. There is something about the ambiance of the building that always seems to make meetings more focused, effective and well-attended. The Library also serves as exhibit space for various artists, students, authors, community groups, etc. that reflect the exciting, inspirational, and often sobering aspects of life in the greater Montclair area.

The value of Library’s programming is comparable to its enviable collection. Not a day goes by when wonderful, enlightening offerings are made to a myriad of user groups. In the summer of 2003, my mother-in-law fought a long hard battle against cancer. My wife and her sisters provided around-the-clock care and the kids and I were “grounded” in Montclair as well. The summer programs e.g. reading club, arts and crafts, trips, chess, and music were a Godsend, enabling the kids to be distracted while the family endured a very trying time. I will forever remember and be grateful to the Library and its staff for helping us to get through it.

Montclair is so fortunate to maintain a cutting-edge library while technologies and competing venues have emerged at a breakneck pace and government funding has been dramatically reduced. Its success is a tribute to taxpayers, benefactors, users, trustees, and, most notably, staff.

The Montclair Public Library is inextricably linked with Montclair’s finest attributes. I hope and pray that it will continue to be protected and cherished by the greater Montclair community.

---Robert Jackson is Mayor of Montclair and serves on the Montclair Public Library Board of Trustees.