

Mark C. Alexander

When I was a child I would walk with my sister a couple of times every week to our local library, and we would get lost in the books. Our visits spurred our imagination and creativity. No wonder we are both professors today! The library not only housed the books, but also served as a beloved home for curiosity, reading and learning.

Over the years I have spent countless hours in great libraries, in my student life, in my family life, and in my professional life.

As a parent in Montclair, our libraries have maintained an important role in my family life. My older children are teenagers now; when they were little we would go to the Montclair Public Library for reading programs, to find books and more. Now, with elementary school-age stepdaughters, the libraries continue to be so very important in providing an outlet for their reading, learning and exploring. Over all these years, I have watched with great fascination as the libraries have moved into the technology age, with digital recordings, computers, and more. As they change, our libraries serve us all by providing access to information, stories, research and knowledge, near and far.

Beyond my life as a parent, I have loved Montclair's libraries for my own work time and space. I frequently have sought out the library as a quiet place to get work done. I love the grand middle stair in the main library that carries me upstairs to great nooks for reading and writing, as well as the high-arching ceiling overhead in the Bellevue Ave. branch, where I can grade exams and papers, and more. These facilities, remarkably, are open to me and the entire community, for our use in all capacities.

Currently the Montclair Public Library also plays an important role in the lives of students from Montclair and the surrounding communities through the After-School Tutoring Program developed by Succeed2gether, a Montclair-based non-profit organization with which I work. Over the past 4 years, dedicated volunteer tutors have spent after-school time to help enrich the academic experience of 60-70 students every year, during the school year. Through the generosity of the children's floor staff in the library, tutors help students in grades 3-12 with homework; read novels and magazines; work on research projects, mathematics and academic enrichment. These tutors and students use the library facilities and learning tools such as computers, encyclopedias, atlases, globes as well as the many fiction and non-fiction books located on the upper floor of the library. Working together, students and tutors explore the arts, sciences, mathematics and humanities. Students recently read and discussed poetry, studied the first explorers to the Americas 13,500 years ago, worked on Spanish conversation and geology. The library makes a huge difference in the academic progress of the students in the program.

While much has changed since my sister and I visited our local library, the bottom line is the same. Whenever you go, the vibrant Montclair Public Libraries provide an enriching experience for all to explore and discover. I am so grateful for their strong presence in our town.

-Mark Alexander, a Montclair resident since 1995, is a law professor at Seton Hall University School of Law.