

LibraryCrunch

Bringing You A "Library 2.0" Perspective, by Michael Casey

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Above and Beyond the Call: The Birth of a New Library

I don't normally write about happenings in my own library, but the past three weeks have been some of the busiest and yet most fulfilling in my career. On Monday, February 20, my new staff of ten library associates arrived onsite in [our new building](#). In addition to these ten, I also have one of my two librarians and my assistant branch manager. These ten associates went through over 55 hours of training and were stationed in other system libraries for several weeks, working with both the staff and the public to learn and practice their new skills.

On Tuesday the 21st, our materials began to arrive. Our first order consisted of over 20 pallets, each weighing approximately 1,000lbs. Two days later we received our second major shipment of the same size. This does not include the daily UPS delivery that sees anywhere from twenty to fifty boxes of books, nor does it include the thousands of audio books that arrived just this past week. Needless to say, this was a lot of stuff for a mostly new staff.

We were, however, not alone. Our materials department saw to it that there was some semblance of order to the deliveries, with our children's materials arriving first since the kid's department was farthest from the entrance. Our IT department provided us with four RFID tagging and writing stations – computers with scanners and RFID antennas, all on special mobile carts that allowed us to unpack and process the books very near where they would be shelved. Not only did this save time and energy, but it quite possibly prevented injuries that are often the result of moving large numbers of books back and forth between boxes, carts, tables and shelves.

So over these past three weeks this small staff has managed to process and shelve almost 80% of what has arrived – this calculates to approximately 54 items processed per person, per hour. Processing includes taking the materials out of the boxes, checking that every item on the packing slip is present (and many packing slips are not in the right boxes, or present at all), placing an RFID tag in every item, scanning the barcode to attach the barcode number to the RFID tag and the database, switching to check-in mode and running the item over the antenna to verify that the database correctly associates that RFID tag to the actual item record, and then shelving the item. Many of these processes were split among several groups in an assembly-line fashion.

While all of this was going on, I was trying to balance all of the requirements that come with having a new staff with the tremendous number of things that still had to be done with the physical structure itself. Completing staff transfer forms, providing keys and security codes, filling out worker's compensation notification forms for every person, and training the new staff on branch safety procedures – all of this had to be done right away. In addition, we continue to work through a very long construction punch-list of items to be fixed or completed. Training from various lighting, security, computer and HVAC vendors was also going on, and I had to try to remember all of this for future use. These are only the large items that I remember now – there were numerous issues regarding trash dumpsters, furniture arrivals, flagpole cabling, telephone functionality, carpet repairs, foyer flooring, temporary office furniture, lost mail, and, last but certainly not least, many late night calls from the security company because our security system needed fine tuning.

None of this should be misconstrued as complaining. The new staff and the support from other branches and headquarters has been amazing. I've often made desperate phone calls to administrative staff, only to be met with friendly understanding and a quick resolution to the problem. Other branches have done an excellent job training and preparing my new staff. And, perhaps most important, that new staff has been amazing. All we have asked of them they have done without complaint or delay. The sight of thousands upon thousands of boxes of items did not deter them from maintaining a positive and energetic attitude. These past three weeks have been overwhelmingly busy, and everyone, staff especially, has responded above and beyond the call.

In a recent note to our entire system I wrote,

"Just today we received a shipment of 18 large book trucks and the staff unpacked them, put them together, and broke down the masses of cardboard, all within thirty minutes just so we could receive another large book shipment only

hours later. It's this kind of determination and flexibility that always amazes but never surprises me. Everyone here has the ability to stop one task, begin and finish another, and then go back to the previous job without skipping a beat, and I think this is testimony to the excellent training they received while working in other branches over the past few months."

We are scheduled to open on Saturday, April 15. I am confident that we will be on time and ready to great our new community of users.

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