

Jill Brantley, Wheaton Library Advisory Committee, joined by the Wheaton-Kensington Chamber of Commerce and the Wheaton Regional Park Neighborhood Association, here to say **thank you for supporting our renovation as a combined library and recreation center forming a “gateway to Wheaton.”**

This is not just a “thank you for doing what we wanted,” it’s an appreciation for **you** working with us, the citizen supporters of the library system in Montgomery County. Through four years of economic crisis, **you’ve** come to our libraries, met with us in groups, read our e-mails, and listened to us here, processing the information we offered to make hard decisions.

These decisions are hard because libraries day in and day out play like Anthony Davis in the first half of the NCAA final against Kansas: where to the uninitiated Davis might have seemed off his game, scoring no points, to the basketball aficionado Davis’s 9 rebounds and 4 assists were the difference in the game.

Libraries are game changers, but showing how requires thoughtful analysis. Last year there were nearly 6 million visits to **Montgomery County libraries**; the close to 700,000 library card holders checked out over 2.6 million materials. **Interviews with 79 Wheaton library patrons** translate those big numbers into individual lives. Patrons use our library to build **economic capital**: e.g., a thirtyish Hispanic man borrows books on business start-ups to plan a construction company; a 20-something African-American, working at Target, visits our popular “Laptop Lane” to search for employment in his college degree area; a middle-aged

white woman who leads the Smithsonian tour Classic Mystery Lovers England, checks out—what else?—the latest mysteries; a middle-aged Hispanic woman with an M.A from NYU seeks work as an economist. Patrons use Wheaton to build **cultural capital**—staying current through magazines in a variety of languages, completing degrees from local universities, preparing for professional exams like the Medical Boards, learning Spanish to improve communication with employees. Patrons mobilize **social capital** through the meeting rooms used for tutoring sessions and studying together, like the Northwood High students preparing their panel on *Raisin in the Sun*. Patrons experience **symbolic capital** when they say to themselves and others “I’m going to the library”—those words, that visit, a symbol of commitment to building a better life; this includes people down on their luck, living in homeless shelters or sleeping on couches at friends. One older man, an unemployed Ethiopian school teacher, said, “This place has saved my life. I am here everyday. If I had money I would give it to the library.”

The library for all these people is more than a safety net, it is, in Hemingway’s phrase, “**a clean well-lighted place**”—especially important in what continue to be dark times for many residents. Thank you for making the hard decisions that maintain that most American of services, the public library.

Interviews by Jill Brantley, Monday, April 9, 2012 Wheaton Library 2-5:30 p.m.

1. Young African American woman (20s) studying to be copy-editor, online course offered through Montgomery College. In library to study with friend. Was having dinner—take-out Thai—in downstairs cafeteria area

2. Her friend, African American guy (probably late 20s), works for county, there for personal spiritual growth, studying Buddhism. Prefers library to home because ‘absence of distractions—everybody is here with same purpose, to study.’ Café additions make this “alternative to Starbucks.”

3. Young Hispanic guy (about 20), using internet to look for work—unemployed right now; looking for landscaping or restaurant work, both of which he has done in the past. Kennedy High graduate. Using Craig’s List and MSN

4. Retired white woman, had been NIH clinical trial specialist, returning books and picking up tax forms; reads variety, both fiction and non-fiction

5. Young African-American man—high school student Northwood High—there for group project; group was doing a talk show on play *A Raisin in the Sun*; had filmed it in one of the upstairs reading rooms.

6. Older African-American woman, works as a private tutor for special needs students from kindergarten through adult, using internet connection, had own laptop

7. Retired white woman, works as volunteer at Book Sale, getting mysteries from new fiction shelves upstairs.

8. Retired white man (#7’s husband), devoted to library; career at NIH as psychologist began with “a storefront library in the Bronx”

9. Permission to use name obtained for this one subject: Carol Kent who leads Smithsonian Tours of Classic Mystery Lovers England was there getting mysteries to read. We have lovely talk about the tour which sounds like much fun. She recommended new mystery to me.

10. Older African American woman waiting to use computer, pursuing job search—had done unemployment survey management in NY, looking for management work or reaching business here.

11. Young Hispanic male (20s) using computer to study English

12. Older Ethiopian man (60s) had been teacher in Ethiopia. Now unemployed. “Spend all my time here. I am here always. If I had money, I would give it to the library.” He was studying a workbook on English as a second language. He is looking for work.

13. Woman in 40s Hispanic descent, using internet to look for job—M.A. economics from NYU

14. Young woman (20s) biology major transferring from Montgomery College to U of Md, studying.

15. Young African-American college student at Catholic University, studying International Politics, lives in Montgomery County; library convenient, good atmosphere for getting work done

16. Middle-aged woman from Haiti, no internet or computer at home; comes to library because “for anything you read there are other books that can serve as a reference.”

17. Her friend, similarly disposed; she had brought book back because it was due but she hadn’t finished it and waiting for the librarian to put it back on the shelves so she could check it out again

18. Hispanic man (30s) looking for information about how to start own business, wants to work in landscaping or home improvement or home inspection, looking at books on how to start your own business.