

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.