Our public libraries are the focus today on across the fence. Libraries are a source of pride and a valued community resource for all ages. But in this digital age of Vermonters are visiting their local libraries for more than books. It’s about public computers Internet and Wi-Fi and expert assistance and accessing online services. Good afternoon and thanks for joining us I’m Judy Simpson. This afternoon we're going to discuss how our libraries are adapting to the digital age and find out how the eVermont broadband project is helping libraries have to close the divide between people who are comfortable in a digital world and those who are trying to catch up. I want to welcome state library and Martha reed of the Vermont department of libraries and Nancy Wilson the librarian at the Lawrence memorial library in Bristol. Thank you for being with us today. Martha let me start out by talking about our public libraries. How many there are how they’re funded?

Martha.: In Vermont we have more libraries per capita than any other state.

Judy.: Which I think is a great statistic.

Martha.: It is and we have about 185 public libraries all sizes. The largest is in Burlington the fletcher free library and our smallest libraries may be opened just a few hours a week with volunteers. So there’s a real range. By statute in Vermont a public library must have some funding from local tax support. All of our libraries have a little bit at least some local public funding and then many of our libraries depend on private fund raising or they may have an endowment.

Judy.: What are some of the services that our libraries provide?

Martha.: I think that if your viewers walked into a library today it would look in some ways very similar to what they remember from their childhood. Books are still king in libraries so we do of course lots of checking out of books. In addition to books there are DVDs and music CDs and other kinds of things. More and more central to the library service are computer and digital technology. Digital resources. Libraries now offer three public
computing centers access to the Internet Wi-Fi and a whole host of Digital Resources online that people can use in the library that now you can be using those from home or from your office.

Judy.: Interesting is this something you are experiencing two Nancy?

Nancy.: Yes we've seen quite a demand for online resources as well as equipment to access online resources and Internet connection

Judy.: This talk about some of the recent flooding from Irene. Libraries were damaged some more than others and there's also an effort underway to help libraries as well.

Martha.: Actually we were really lucky in our public libraries. We had not as much damage as some businesses in those towns. The worst was our library in West Hartford. The bottom floor was merged so they're going to have to do a lot of damage reconstruction in that library. But in other towns they fared pretty well. We do have a fund raising effort the department of libraries operates the Vermont public library foundation and people can donate money for helping to repair libraries to buy books? Particularly for the West Hartford library and they can find that at the department of library's web site. I think the best story about Irene and libraries is what happened after the storm. I have great stories of librarians who took extreme measures to get from their homes. They may have been isolated. Climbing over rocks and through roads that were out to get to the library to open the doors and they've seen a steady stream of people coming in to access phones. People didn't have phone service didn't have Internet so they opened extra hours. They've seen lots of use of the Internet of course. Photocopiers fax machines people are trying to get those FEMA Insurance kinds of forms done so lots of use of those libraries and the librarians out there have just been fabulous.

Judy.: Once again the library the hub of the community. So how our libraries adapting to the digital age?

Martha.: There's a question.

Judy.: There's a lot of changes.

Nancy.: There is a lot of changes. It's changed so much I've been at this library my library in Bristol for 22 years. It's a big change for us it's a real challenge for us to keep up with the emerging technologies just as a staff. The department of libraries does great training for us so we can keep up. I've also seen a lot more traffic at my library because people are coming and they're staying longer. It wasn't so long ago that I thought we should have fewer seats in our library because people were coming taking things and leaving in who are not staying and now sometimes there's not a seat to be found with people on laptops people doing research were like an office away from home sometimes. People will say hours with
their papers spread out all over the table. For students and tourists new users and people who cannot afford a computer we are the crucial place in town to come for access. Funny you should mention FEMA because FEMA actually set up an office in our library earlier this summer. A couple of FEMA people took over one of our tables and were there for people who needed to apply for aid because we flooded in Bristol in the spring. The may floods over Memorial Day. We see people parked outside of our library using our Wi-Fi 24 hours a day. I'll drive by late night and people will be out there using Wi-Fi. We've really become with the online resources of 24/7 library service in our community.

Judy.: That's a big change because I know Nancy as far as you're concerned your grandmother was a librarian.

Nancy.: She was.

Judy.: Think about how far things have come since those days.

Nancy.: It's changed dramatically. She opened her little home and Georgia Vermont and let people use these books from her front room. My mom was a librarian and my uncle was a librarian for a long time at the Brownell library in Essex. I've seen some changes I've grown up around libraries my entire life and books are still crucially important. I don't want to give them short shrift but emergency technology is very exciting.

Judy.: Let's pick up on the e-Vermont project. It's something that we've discussed previously on across the fence but what exactly is the library role?

Martha.: This has been a great grant project and in the grants that we got from the Federal government's it included about $100,000 for public libraries. Mostly for equipment. We're working with 23 libraries in 24 of the Vermont towns and those libraries have submitted proposals working with their local committees finding out where the needs are in the town and then submitting proposals to the department of libraries mostly for equipment. In the first year we worked with 13 libraries we bought lots of laptops and get books Nancy and a couple of other libraries bought I pads. Lots of scanners and printers. The idea was to expand their ability to have public computing in the library and in some cases introduce people to new kinds of technology. A lot of people have never used and have never downloaded an e-book. Libraries now are providing the books for downloading and audio books for downloading. A lot of this equipment is just to get people comfortable to introduce them but also for those folks that don't have this equipment at home they can come to the library in use it. It's been a tremendous project. Some libraries have use this money to automate so then moving from the card catalog to the automated library catalog and we hear from people in those communities how wonderful that is because now they can access what the library offers from home 24/7.

Judy.: Let's talk a little bit about some of the different proposals because they are really very specific to each community
Martha.: Nancy will be able to tell you about her proposal but in Canaan for example where that town has been hard hit by unemployment. The librarians there in that library wanted to focus on equipment laptops that would help people have lost jobs retool for the digital age. One of the most used terms now in the library's is digital literacy. We talk about literacy greeting literacy but now are really helping citizens learn how use computers wisely. How to search the Internet how to use online products so in cane and that's one thing they May 1 of the folks on. Where in Arlington they have a local history collection? And they're using some of this equipment to digitize their local photographs and town history so people can read them online?

Judy.: Nancy let's talk about what's going on in Bristol?

Nancy.: When we first sat down and decided to apply for an e-Vermont grant lee identified three needs in our community. We really wanted to develop downtown business. We have a very vibrant downtown but we need to get online with that downtown and we also wanted to our second need was to develop communities through online forums. The third was simply access to equipment and the Internet. Libraries have always been all about access so that's the part of the grant that I was really behind pushing. We are working on a downtown wireless and we did receive computers from the department of libraries. I pads as well as net books that we're calling a computer lab that can be taken out of the library when it needs to go out. I can explain more about that.

Judy.: Yes would you please.

Nancy.: Sure. We are working currently with the Champlain valley area agency on aging and the Vermont State colleges to either find a Merrick or volunteers or interns that can come and take our lab out to senior male sites in our town. We have lunches at the legion and also a lodge in the town that we're hoping they can take the equipment out no pressure let people try it see what's there see if there's anything they can do. We're finding that there is a gap with people over the age of 65 to 70. They just don't have the technological skills so we're hoping to go out to them because it's hard sometimes for people to get into the library. The lab is also available for any community organization that wants to do a training for example if the downtown business wants to do some kind of a training they can take the lab out of our building and use it wherever. The right now we are lending them also individually the people that come in the library's so they can look things up and do things like that. The other need that we saw in our community is helping people apply for state benefits online. Lots and lots of things have gone online now and you'll find people who are applying for unemployment or some kind of social services sometimes don't have computer skills. So we have a need for them to have a private place and like many libraries in the state we are pretty open floor plan and it's very difficult to help people do both kinds of things on site so we built a partnership with a nearby church across a street that has it open all day long that we can go across with their equipment and help people do that so we're doing those two things.
Judy.: That's really important because if you're not used to using a computer and all of a sudden you have to navigate through a web site to get something really important that is really intimidating.

Nancy.: Exactly.

Judy.: Martha are all the Vermont towns going in this direction?

Martha.: They are and I think Nancy has a great example of how the library is partnered with other community agencies and organizations to really make services that are local that really meet local needs. Yes we are now working with the library's in round two and we're really excited to see what kinds of projects they're going to come up with.

Judy.: There's also something coming up in November at Lynden State College that you wanted to talk about.

Martha.: As a home this be Vermont project has had lots of training and workshops and farina conferences over the last year. The next one that will be coming up is November 19th at Lynden State College. It is the community leadership in a connected age conference so there will be this is free open to the public or maybe a small fee because it includes lunch. At that conference we will have the Vermont towns doing a variety of programs to show what's been happening. There will be a panel of librarians to talk about what has happened in these libraries and e Vermont Town. It's a wonderful opportunity for all Vermonters. We'd like citizens from across the state to attend all ages to find out what's been happening in these e Vermont towns. One of our great goals is to replicate this beyond the Federal grant. So that other towns can look at their communities see what needs they have that can be met with digital technology from local governments schools libraries businesses and really get ideas of what's happened in these 24 towns see if they can put it to work in their own towns.

Judy.: That's exciting.

Martha.: It's been very exciting.

Nancy.: I went to the last we had one conference like this and all day conference on a Saturday. I don't remember what it was; was it in spring? I just went as a participant and it was really wonderful it was really eye opening learning about the new upcoming technologies and how people are applying them I thought it was exciting.

Judy.: Any ideas that you brought back from Bristol?
Nancy.: It's all about mobile that's all the conference is that I've been attending lately it's all about mobile so we have to make sure that our resources are usable on a mobile device. So that was the biggest thing I got out of that day I think.

Judy.: That's wonderful. That's another conference coming up Saturday, November 19 at Lynden State college free except for maybe a small fee for lunch and for more information about that event and about the eVermont broadband project you can go to the web site on your screen the address is WWW.e4VT.org or you can call the number is (802)-225-6091. Or better yet just stop by your local library and see what's new; you might be very surprised. Thanks so much for joining us. That's our program for today I'm Judy Simpson we will see you again next time on across the fence.

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