

# *The Role and Mission of Public Libraries*

## HOW OUR LIBRARIES CAME TO BE

The concept of a free, public library was created hundreds of years ago by Benjamin Franklin. It was reinforced with Thomas Jefferson's gift of his library to fill the Library of Congress. The ideas and information libraries contain were then indexed and organized by Melvil Dewey. And, of course, Andrew Carnegie's legendary generosity financed construction of libraries all across the country, including Palo Alto's first downtown library.

Because of this heritage, libraries are designed to enable people of all ages and backgrounds to participate in a democratic society by providing *free and equal access* to information.

## WHAT OUR LIBRARIES DO NOW

Libraries welcome *everyone and anyone* to a range of activities and environments including quiet study and reading, collective learning, browsing, and socializing. New residents, whether they moved here from across the Bay or across the ocean, often come to the library to learn about their new community and how to find the services they need.

The library's mission is to be the *learning center* for people throughout their lives. Libraries support literacy for beginning readers, children, adults, and those who speak more than one language. Libraries provide a wide range of cultural and intellectual opportunities to everyone in the community.

The library provides information and reading materials in a variety of formats, both *traditional and virtual*. This means that information can be available in books, newspapers, and magazines, on CDs and DVDs, online, displayed visually or communicated orally, or in downloadable formats. Professional librarians are a crucial resource for helping patrons find the information they need, whether it's in a book or online.

The library has always provided information using the *newest technology*, from searchable card catalogs to books on tape and then CD, to electronic databases now available from home and wi-fi for loaner laptops. It will always be the place that provides access to technology to everyone, regardless of ability to pay.

## WHERE OUR LIBRARIES ARE HEADED

Libraries as places are evolving as *learning and work patterns change*. Today's libraries are designed to accommodate group work, provide a place for community activities, and incorporate access to today's technology. Tomorrow's libraries will use different technology, but they will always provide free and equal access to information for everyone in the community.

