New library card works at 5 library systems

FAU, PBCC and school district libraries join county system and West Palm Beach.

Aim Young checks out a book at the S.K. Wimberly Library on the main campus of Florida Atlantic University with the help of Nikki Rosenthal. Photo story on new Library collaboration to share materials between five Palm Beach County systems. (Jim Rassol, Sun Sentinel July 30, 2009)

By Stephanie Wang South Florida Sun-Sentinel
July 30, 2009

Five local libraries have launched a new lending program, the first of its kind in the state, to make their books and other resources available to each other's card holders.

If you are a patron of any of the libraries — Palm Beach County, West Palm Beach and those at Palm Beach County public schools, Palm Beach Community College and Florida Atlantic University— the Sunshine Library Card will let you check out items from all five systems.

"It really complements the types of materials available and gives the library user access to this full range of materials," said Tom Sloman, executive director of the West Palm Beach Library Information Network which coordinated the agreement.

The sharing service lifts previous borrowing restrictions for unaffiliated visitors.

It's the first collaboration in the state that directly connects academic resources and popular literature — distinct from the existing Interlibrary Loan, which links the contents of all of Florida's public libraries.

In the few months since the program's spring debut, about 500 people have signed up for the yellow-and-blue card.

Libraries extend the card to benefit high school students taking high-level Advanced Placement or International Baccalaureate classes. Retirees, business people and people pursuing degrees may also show interest in checking out academic volumes, while education students may enjoy the ready availability of children's books, Sloman said.

With so many items available in each library's collection, there is little concern about overlapping demand for any one science. Academic fields tend to elaborate on very specific topics, and public libraries order multiple copies of popular books.

"If people came in and demurred our collections like a plague of locusts, we'd really have to rethink it," said Bill Miller, dean of librarians at FAU. A $10,000 state grant paid start-up costs and continuing costs will be small, Sloman said.

After a year, the five libraries will re-examine the shared-borrowing policies and may consider expanding within Palm Beach County and into other areas of South Florida, Sloman said.

"The more easily accessible it is, the more educated people can get," he said.

Stephanie Wang can be reached at awang@sun-sentinel.com or 561-243-6545.

Copyright © 2009, South Florida Sun-Sentinel