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Sunshine Card Encourages Library Cardholders to Borrow Books from FAU and Other Libraries in Palm Beach County

BOCA RATON, FL (July 16, 2009) – Florida Atlantic University Libraries are among five library systems in Palm Beach County that are piloting a program that allows library cardholders to check-out materials from participating libraries.

The recently created Sunshine Library Card program encourages borrowing among academic, public and school libraries. It gives libraries a chance to open their collections to the broader community while giving their own cardholders the opportunity to access the collections of other libraries.

Palm Beach Community College (PBCC), the Palm Beach County School District, Palm Beach County and the City of West Palm Beach are also part of the pilot program.

Educators say the biggest benefactors of the program are public library cardholders and advanced high school students because the program gives them access to massive academic collections.

“We are happy to extend our services to the local community in this way.” said Dr. William Miller, dean of Libraries at FAU. “The services we offer to our students and faculty will not be affected, and our own users will have access to the holdings of libraries throughout the county.”

Although the public has always been welcome to use FAU’s library collections within the libraries, its 2.5 million items had been available for checking out only by its students, staff, faculty and affiliated users. Palm Beach Community College has 203,000 items and had 32,000 cardholders prior to the program. The Palm Beach County Library system has 1.7 million items and more than 500,000 cardholders.

The Southeast Florida Library Information Network (SEFLIN) facilitated the discussions and partnership agreements to establish the Sunshine Library Card program and is administering it. The network modeled the card program after a successful program it has operated for 23 academic libraries for more than a decade.

“Breaking down barriers is what the Sunshine Library Card program is really trying to accomplish,” said Tom Sloan, SEFLIN’s executive director.

The Sunshine Card is issued by the user’s home library and allows cardholders to check-out books, but it does not necessarily include all other services the libraries might provide for their regular users. All of the participating libraries are members of the network. To be eligible for the Sunshine Card, a person must be at least 16 years old with a valid library card from one of the participating libraries or be an Advanced Placement or International Baccalaureate high school student, said Sloan.

“The program opens the door to more libraries and library services in Palm Beach County,” said Sloan. “This program allows registered library users to move seamlessly among different types of libraries to borrow materials.”

SEFLIN, a nonprofit group founded in 1984, fosters cooperation among member libraries and partners to advance staff development, information services, resource sharing, the recognition and promotion of libraries, and disaster preparedness and response planning.

There are already discussions about other libraries joining the program, but SEFLIN wants to see the response to the program before expanding it. The program also will be reviewed after the first year to determine its future.

Brian Kelley, the library learning resources center director at PBCC, encourages those eligible for the Sunshine Card to take advantage of the services. One card that will gain access to the rich resources of the libraries of Palm Beach County is unprecedented and ultimately serves as a model for the entire state of Florida, he said.

“The idea that all library materials should be available to the citizens of Palm Beach County and eventually south Florida and then ultimately the entire state is a sign of the times and the dissolving boundaries between libraries of all types,” said Kelley.

For more information on the Sunshine Card program, call Tom Sloan at 877-733-5460.

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Photo #1: Sunshine Library Card