

BUSINESS

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State public library system's array of services is a real deal

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By **Robbie Dingeman**
Advertiser Columnist

If saving money ranks high on your New Year's resolution list, consider a card you may already have in your wallet: a Hawai'i state library card.

ADVERTISEMENT Instead of spending money at a bookstore, residents can borrow for free from a statewide collection of 3.5 million books.

"We will at no charge send a book from the main library to Hana, from Kapolei to Hilo. We are the only library that offers statewide access," State Librarian Burns said. "Anyone with a library card on any island has access to materials statewide."

The Hawai'i State Public Library System also offers a host of services including: computer and Internet access, a redesigned Web site, free use of various databases, cheap DVD rentals and an increasing array of electronic information.

(Conflict of interest confession: This columnist is a lifelong library goer, raised by lifelong library goers, raising another generation of card-carrying library goers.)

The worsening economy has boosted business for libraries here and nationwide, Burns said.

"Every statistic we keep has gone up in the last six months," he said. "We have more people coming into the libraries; we have more items circulating (more than 7 million books last year); we have more people using the Internet."

Burn said some of the upswing is directly linked to the economy with more people using library computers to to submit job applications, find out more about education and seek job training. Burns encourages more folks to ask for help finding what they want.

"I think our staff is a gem statewide," he said. "We have trained professionals in all of our libraries that can help people find materials that they want rather than just depending on luck to find a book you might want."

And as of this just-ended year, that reference help also is now available through the Internet if you click on "ask a librarian." With this reference service, "you can e-mail a question anytime and they will get back to you with an answer within two working days," Burns said.

And those librarians know how to dig deep for even tough and obscure questions. (Trust me on this one!)

"I think they look at it as a challenge to find these difficult tidbits of information," Burns said.

The library also recently broadened its electronic book service from solely a PC-based technology to a Mac-friendly format.

For years, librarians and library-goers complained that the most popular digital audio player — the

SAVE MONEY, VISIT A STATE LIBRARY

- In person at branches statewide and on the Internet at <http://www.librarieshawaii.org/>.
- Residents and military personnel and their dependents can get a free library card and borrow books — including best sellers — from the 3.5 million collection in the Hawaii State Public Library System.
- 24/7 remote access to online databases and the library's catalog
- Music CDs can be borrowed for free.
- Free access to the Internet at public libraries.
- Free access to audiobooks for people who use both PC-based technology and the popular Mac-friendly platform available on iPods, and other mobile devices.
- Free access to a variety of magazines and newspaper archives.
- DVD rentals at a rate of \$1 a week.
- Wi-Fi wireless public access at Salt Lake-Moanalua Public Library

Source: *Hawai'i State Public Library System*

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iPod — was incompatible with Windows Media Audio files, the format offered by libraries for downloadable audio. Beginning this summer, the company OverDrive began offering at least 3,000 titles—about 15 percent of its catalog—in MP3 format compatible with most MP3 players and mobile phone, including iPods and iPhones.

Burns said the libraries system's collection of electronic books has grown to 10,000 although fewer are available in the new format, which has only been available for a few months.

He said he recently noticed that some commercial Web sites offer an introductory rate for ebooks of about \$10 a month. "You can get the same thing free at different libraries," he said. "It's a tremendous bargain."

The economic downturn is taking a toll on the libraries as well: 7 percent budget cuts last year and 10 percent this year meant loss of temporary and part-time workers and reduced hours, as well as nearly \$2 million less to buy materials, he said.

So far, "we won't have to lay off full time permanent staff and we won't have to close libraries," Burns said.

"It is ironic that when folks need us the most and are showing they are turning to us more, at the same time we are looking at cutbacks," Burns said. "That's very disappointing for us but obviously we'll continue to do our best to provide the best service we can for Hawai'i."

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