Tuesday, November 02, 2010

Cutler Lending Library Unveiled

After over a year's worth of work, our Lending Library was officially unveiled yesterday. It was part of a USDA Rural Development grant (also part of an American Recovery and Reinvestment Act), a $100,000 project. This is one of the projects I spoke about at Internet Librarian, and I will further discuss at the California Library Association Conference in November of this year.

The product is called the Brodart Lending Library. We selected this machine because it was cheaper and easier to use than other machines. In particular, the Library-go-go machine is $140,000 to implement fully and you need a Swedish team to come out to install and deal with any technical issues. The Brodart library is created and maintained in the United States and can be accessed remotely by cell tower. The product is only $17,000. We paid an additional $10,000 to custom build this machine so that it did not require internet access. The rest was for the bookdrop, books, and building the housing to protect the machine. Information is stored locally on the machine, with a branch librarian coming out weekly to get the information and re-stock the machine. It's as easy to use as a candy machine, and you just need to know the number of the book you want and have a library card; it's that simple.

I am especially proud of our staff for getting all this together. It took a year of planning, but just like cooking, most of the action is in the last moments. We paid for the machine and had it custom built.We had to contact the Cutler Public Utility District to get permission to build a structure on their grounds to house the machine. It took coordination from our Public Works, the Utility Office, canvassing the schools and businesses, and working with Brodart to get all the technical requirements correct to go live. It all worked beautifully. It was also a wonderful location since it was right across the street from the school and it sits in between the school and the way home for the kids.

When I got out there yesterday there were kids streaming in from everywhere excited about the machine. We had about 300 kids at the event and we signed up 200 of them for new library cards. It's wonderful to see the heavy use considering this area where 60% of the population does not have a high school education and 80% are mono-lingual Spanish speakers. We had kids running up and asking about it, then running to our bookmobile to get library cards and then coming back. We had a whole row of books gone in under an hour!
UPDATE!! After one day's use, the book machine is now empty. That's 300 books gone in one day!

Posted by Jeff Scott at 10:59 AM

Labels: American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009, future of libraries, futureofbooks, Grants