

Dear Editor,

I am writing to share how deeply the North Port Library enriches and strengthens our community. As an employee of the North Port Library, I have seen firsthand the difference our institution makes in the lives of people from all walks of life. Libraries remain a lifeline: places where patrons seek resources, support, and connection, whether for their own needs or those of their families. While the library is still a wonderful place to discover a new bestseller or read a picture book to your child, it has become much more. It is our modern town square, a welcoming space that counters the isolation so common in today's world. Unfortunately, I believe that library services can too often be taken for granted as they are often the first to get cut when it comes to the budget.

Our library is dedicated to advancing education for all who walk through our doors. We provide early childhood development opportunities through our community partners Forty Carrots and Fun To Be Fit, helping our youngest learners grow and thrive. Adults can build vital digital literacy skills through our Tech Navigator program, which offers one-on-one guidance to help them succeed in our increasingly technology-driven world. Homeschooling families rely on us for teaching materials, curriculum support, and a safe place to meet with other families. Every afternoon, teens gather in our teen room to study, socialize, and enjoy a positive environment designed specifically for them.

This past summer, the North Port Library partnered with Sarasota County Schools to provide a total of 525 free lunches to children last summer. Our Charlie Cart program offers hands-on cooking lessons that teach healthy eating, recipe mastery, and confidence in the kitchen.

Community groups also depend on the library through our meeting spaces. Whether someone is attending an English literacy class, participating in a homeowners association meeting, or reserving a study room to prepare for an, these rooms are open and accessible to all.

Technology access is another essential service. Patrons of all ages use our public computers, free Wi-Fi, faxing, scanning, and printing. Library card holders can borrow hotspots to gain Internet access at home or check out educational electronic games through our launchpads. Our digital offerings continue to grow and include our main e-book collection through the Cloud Library, Flipster for magazines, and PressReader for newspapers from across the country and around the world.

Of course, our extensive collection of physical books, DVDs, and periodicals remain as popular as ever. Through our courier service, patrons can easily borrow materials from any Sarasota County library and have them delivered directly to North Port. And with our fine-free policy, we ensure every patron feels welcome (even if a book comes back a day or two late).

Each year, the library system has a cultural celebration through our One Book events. Last year's selection, Remarkably Bright Creatures, brought author Shelby Van

Pelt to the North Port High School Performing Arts Center, where residents filled the auditorium for an engaging and memorable afternoon.

I hope this letter makes clear just how vital the North Port Library is to our civic life. Thank you for your time, and I hope to see you soon at the library.

Sincerely,

Jeff Shuster

Customer Service Representative, North Port Library