

Memberships spike at West Chester library as cuts loom

By [Dave Greber](#), Staff Writer

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WEST CHESTER TWP. — Whether because of the economy, selection of items or curiosity, business buzzes at the new West Chester branch of the Middletown Public Library.

In just its first five months of operation at the new facility in the Union Centre Boulevard area — which more than tripled the size of the former building off Cox Road — the library branch has doubled its average monthly memberships.

Prior to the Nov. 15, 2009 move into the new building across from Lakota West High School, the branch saw an average of between 300 and 400 new memberships per month — far exceeding the other branches in Trenton and Middletown, library officials said.

For the past few months, memberships have jumped to an average of between 700 and 800 per month, records show. And all this is handled by a smaller staff, shrinking budgets and steeper cuts looming.

On a typical afternoon last week — around 1:30 p.m. — all five private study rooms were taken; beeps from self-check out aisles and the whirl of the automatic sliding entrance seemed incessant; children read with parents; adults read with earphones; and, 21 of the 24 Internet-accessible computers were taken.

“It’s usually not like this,” said a smiling West Chester branch Manager Steve Mayhugh. “It’s usually busier than this.”

Spring Break brought JoAnn Niermeyer, of West Chester, and her 7-year-old daughter Alyson together on a couch in the building’s children section.

A member for the past five years, Niermeyer has been to the new location about five times since it opened. She said she was surprised to see such a large and modern building, but delighted by an area that catered more to her family’s needs.

Still, she and her family have some tough decisions before them. Alyson is a student in Lakota schools, which is joining the Middletown Public Library system on the ballot early next month.

She fears the new building’s appearance will cause voters to second-guess the library’s need for a 0.75-mill levy.

“This is a wonderful building, a wonderful place, but we were content with the other place,” Niermeyer said.

As was the case with the library’s old location off Cox, the new \$13.3 million library is owned by the

township. Mayhugh said other than increased utilities, costs have remained largely the same.

Still, competing levies in a slow-to-recover economy may mean a pick-and-choose approach for voters. “The library’s important, and we’re thinking about it as a family, but at the same time, there are other things to consider,” Niermeyer said, adding the library levy “is not going to be at the top of our list.”

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