

County's rural libraries worth a visit

Lori Maki / Guest Column

Through the hard work of volunteers, the support of local governments, and the financial support of residents, these libraries have been able to grow and expand to meet the increased demands of their patrons.

Library patrons can place requests online from the library or a home computer. Those requests are quickly processed through the library computer system and sent to the patron's home library, saving time and travel. There is no charge for this service. Books and other items may be returned to any FLLS member library, where they will be checked in and returned to the owning library.

In addition to traditional library services, the rural libraries offer electronic resources. Numerous subscription databases are available for free to library card holders through the library system Web site. These databases offer a wealth of articles and information on many topics. They provide information for students, often more reliable and respected than what they can find through Google. Genealogists will find census records and more through Heritage Quest. Newspaper indexes, health sources and many other subjects are covered by the databases. Again, this vast information source is available both at the library and via the Web to library card holders.

Public access computers are available at all four rural libraries. Patrons may browse the Internet or use word processing or other computer programs. Computer use policies and time limitations vary from library to library. High-speed access and printing capabilities make computer use fast and easy. Currently, the Newfield Public Library and the Ulysses Philomathic Library in Trumansburg offer high speed wireless access.

Story times, summer reading programs and other special events encourage children's reading. Connecting with the young people in our communities is an especially important goal at all the rural libraries. Visits by authors, illustrators, puppeteers, magicians, musicians and more have been a staple of children's programming by these libraries. Visits by school classes and librarian visits to the schools are another great way of introducing libraries to young people. Several of the rural libraries routinely employ high school students. This provides jobs, teaches skills and often helps teens gain experience in a positive work environment. The library prof-

its by having employees who bring energy, up-to-date computer skills and enthusiasm to their job.

All of these services and more are found at the rural libraries, but they are special in another important respect. These libraries are part of their communities. They are connected locally, knowing their patrons and being able to respond to them in a personal way. Each of these communities — Dryden, Groton, Newfield and Trumansburg — has its own flavor, which is reflected in the libraries. The collections, programs and services of each library are unique, just as each of these communities is unique.

The rural libraries work with each other and with the library system and its member libraries. This allows "small" libraries to offer great service to their patrons. If you have never visited your rural library, stop in soon. You will find a vast array of services, and perhaps that bestseller you have wanted to read will be there waiting for you.

To find more information on your local library, including hours and contact information, visit the Finger Lakes Library System Web site at www.flls.org.

This column was authored by Lois Maki, Newfield Library director, Julia Schult, Groton Public Library director, Judy Barkee, Ulysses Philomathic Library (Trumansburg) director, and Sarah Dovi, Southworth Library (Dryden) director.

Tompkins County residents are fortunate to have access to library services at several locations throughout the area. The communities of Dryden, Groton, Newfield and Trumansburg all have independent local public libraries, dubbed by the County Legislature "Rural Libraries." Most of these libraries have been serving their communities for many years, in some cases 100 years or more. Through the hard work of volunteers, the support of local governments and the financial support of residents, these libraries have been able to grow and expand to meet the increased demands of their patrons. Though each of these libraries is an independent organization, they are all members of the Finger Lakes Library System — as is Tompkins County Public Library in Ithaca — enhancing cooperative efforts between the libraries and enabling us to offer services and collections that otherwise would be beyond our reach.

Each of the rural libraries offers books, videos, DVDs, books on tape, CDs, magazines, newspapers, reference materials and more. The library system lends each local library a rotating collection of books and videos, which means materials are always changing at the rural libraries. In addition, the system makes it easy to exchange books and videos among member libraries. There are 31 member libraries in the system willing to lend most of their collections to other member libraries, so our patrons have access to more than 400,000 titles.