

FROM THE BOSTON GLOBE...IDEAS

Prom dresses, cake pans, and power tools: Welcome to the new public library

Public libraries have evolved to meet the needs of their communities, with some even building housing. As needs continue to change, so too will libraries.

By Tony Rehagen,



John Agnew has lived in Caruthersville, a small farming community in Missouri’s southeast Bootheel region, for every one of his 42 years. Yet he hadn’t set foot in the public library, barely a block off the town’s main drag, until just a few weeks ago. “When I was younger,” he says, “I thought the library was just about books.”

What finally brought Agnew through the swinging glass doors wasn't the latest best-seller, but a Facebook post announcing a "Job Center at the Library." On the last Tuesday of every month, a representative from the Missouri Career Center in Kennett, the nearest state unemployment office some 25 miles west, sets up a laptop in the library's front conference room and helps residents register for state benefits and fill out applications for job training and local employment.

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