



making a difference

Story by Jackie Ostrowicki, Assistant Vice President for University Affairs at the University of Nebraska, an avid library user, and a Country Club Neighborhood resident | Photos by Emily Hardy Photography

SOUTH BRANCH

# Library

KNOWLEDGE IS POWER

What is a library for? To encourage learning? To give young children tools to be successful? To make information accessible? All of the above and more. That's a lot to unpack from a 4,900-square-foot library that's smaller than some homes in the Country Club neighborhood. However, the South Branch Library tackles making a difference one book at a time.

Patrons borrow nearly 100,000 books from South Branch each year. The branch processes an additional 35,000 non-print checkouts, such as music, DVDs, and digital and audio books every year. Community members make over 66,000 visits annually. Hidden behind an unpretentious exterior, the South Branch Library does heavy lifting for such a small space.

*The Chronicle* caught up with Pat Leach, Lincoln City Library's director (also a Country Club Neighborhood resident), and Brenda Ealey, South Branch Library's manager, to find out more. South Branch is one of the oldest libraries in Lincoln and believed

to be the first library built as a branch. The property was donated by Mr. and Mrs. Bennett Martin. One of three neighborhood branches within Lincoln's eight library locations, South Branch offers the same range of services as sister libraries, with smaller selections. "Our librarians are experts at curating offerings for their neighborhoods," Pat told me.

Pat has lived in the Country Club neighborhood since 1991, in the same house on Ryons Street. She's been with Lincoln's library system for 40 years, including a four-year stint at South Branch. "I found the house while driving to work," she shared. "In a way, the library brought me my home."

Brenda thinks this branch is a surprise. "People believe there can't be much here because of its small footprint. But limited space makes the collection even more vital." She explained its function as a neighborhood library: "Patrons drive by it every day; they walk to it. It's not just where they get books; it's a gathering place."



Left: Pat Leach, Lincoln City Library's director -- also a Country Club neighborhood resident!  
Right: Brenda Ealey, South Branch Library's manager



From summer reading programs to book clubs, research assistance to computer access, the programs and services at South Branch Library create a shared space. Parents meet for playdates and librarians greet regulars by name. "Our size makes it easier to know people—and easier to serve people," says Brenda.

The branch's patrons are diverse; Pat and Brenda see people of all ages, ethnicities, and walks of life. "Our neighborhood embraces this branch," said Pat. "Even if they don't use it, they feel that it's important." That was clear in 2009 when Lincoln went through budget cuts, and South Branch was on the line. "There were protesters with 'Save the Library' signs," Pat remembered. "Libraries in older neighborhoods have passionate advocates. Everyone has a sense of ownership."

How can our neighborhood keep South Branch strong today? "Use our services," said Pat. Recent changes, such as eliminating overdue fees for children's books, make that easier. "Bring your kids in," added Brenda. "The small space allows you to keep an eye on them."

And lastly, if you don't have one yet, stop in and get a library card.



Do you know of a neighbor who is making a difference? Small or large... we'd love to hear about it. Please contact [jill.thechronicle@gmail.com](mailto:jill.thechronicle@gmail.com).



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