

LEARNING

At the Jenna Welch and Laura Bush Community Library, college students share library space with teens, babies, and grandparents

By Young C. Jackson and Helen Bell



The El Paso Community College library is named for First Lady Laura Bush and her mother, Jenna Welch, above. Below, a panorama of intergenerational activity at the joint-use facility.

Two El Paso (Tex.) Community College students pore over research texts next to a high school student Googling an online source not far from 14 teen mothers learning to delight their babies with nursery rhymes and rhythms. Such is the scene at the library on EPCC's northwest campus, as described by Phyllis Price, a member of the library's Friends group.

"Hear a pin drop in this academic library? No way!" Price wrote to her colleagues. "The Jenna Welch and Laura Bush Community Library is one lively, community-building place where people are learning side by side."

Babies learning and teens participating in fun activities in the middle of an academic library are all part of the way librarians at this joint-use facility are redefining what a library can be.

The library partnership was created by EPCC President Richard Rhodes and El Paso Public Library Director Carol Brey-Casiano. "With passion, perseverance, and trust, joint-use partnership can be a resounding success," Rhodes emphasized while serving as a panelist in a program on joint-use partnerships at the American

Library Association's 2005 Annual Conference.

Both EPCC and EPPL are driven by a common goal—serving the underserved community in the northwest section of the city. This dynamic partnership has been strengthened by efforts from such local organizations as the Canutillo Independent School District, the El Paso Independent School District, and the YWCA.

Named in honor of Jenna Welch, who grew up in the community, and her daughter, Laura Bush—the current first



SIDE BY SIDE

lady and a great promoter of literacy and libraries—the library has been energized by two visionary librarians, Monica Wong, the library’s head librarian, and Anna Hernandez, EPPL’s youth librarian. “Those entering into partnerships should be prepared for great opportunities to come with a great deal of work,” says Wong, adding that she would like the library to become the “in” place to be for people in the community.

Over the last four years, the number of programs offered has more than quadrupled, as has attendance, growing from 119 programs and 3,752 attendees to 546 programs and 17,289 attendees. Wong and Hernandez recognized the greatest need for programs during the summer months, and they have filled this void, developing a wide variety of programs with much-needed activities for young members of the community. Programs have included creative and practical writing, sign language, science fair workshops, an anime club, guitar basics, belly dancing, martial arts, and a weekly children’s reading program—activities that tap into our young people’s interests and use them as motivation for developing reading and lifelong learning skills.

One of the library’s featured programs, Babies @ the Library, is modeled after ALA’s “Born to Read” and EPPL’s “I’m Learning! *Estoy Aprendiendo!*” programs. “It is de-

signed to meet the needs of parents and their babies,” explains Hernandez. Over the years, the community has applauded it with features in the local media.

College students and community members take advantage of the teen and children’s programs by bringing their families along while they do their academic work in the library. Many have expressed their appreciation for the benefits of this unique arrangement.

The library leads successful and innovative academic programs as well, including ESL Family Literacy—which brings family members together to write their stories using publishing software, digital cameras, and scanning equipment—and *Borderlands*, an annual publication of local history led by faculty advisor Ruth Vise and researched by her students. Through collaborative efforts with the

library, *Borderlands* is digitized and made available online at www.epcc.edu/nwlibrary/borderlands/.

The Jenna Welch and Laura Bush Community Library serves as a social environment for all age levels—a place where college students share space with teens, babies, and grandparents. According to Brey-Casiano, “The most important characteristic of the library of the future is its role as place—a destination for many who seek a social environment in which to learn and grow.” ■

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