Prince George County Libraries Case Story

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What the Hyattsville Branch says about Scannx Book ScanCenter:

"The biggest thing that keeps coming up is how easy (the Scannx Book ScanCenter) is to use, and how it does beautiful crisp scans. If it were up to me, I'd put one in every branch."

Colleen Formby
Maryland Room Librarian
Hyattsville Branch, Prince George County Library in Maryland

About Prince George County Libraries and the Hyattsville Branch

Prince George County in Maryland – located just outside the District of Columbia – has a population of about 870,000, and census figures list it as one of the wealthiest African American-majority counties in the United States. The county's 19-branch public library system is dedicated to providing the county's residents with both public spaces and the resources to support early literacy, after-school enrichment, and workforce development. The county is committed to keeping its libraries up-to-date and technologically current, and each year some of the branches are renovated. Most recently, the Hillcrest Heights branch re-opened in September 2012 after a 9-month renovation, and the Glenarden branch closed in August 2012 for a six-month renovation. In addition, there is a brand new branch under construction in South Bowie scheduled to open by early 2013.

One of St. George's busiest branches is in Hyattsville, Md., just outside Washington D.C., on the Metro's Green Line. Scheduled to be renovated in 2013, the branch attracts a large number of government workers, as well as students from nearby University of Maryland, American University and Prince George's Community College. In recent years, a growing number of residents have used the library's resources to search for and apply for jobs. In addition, historians and genealogist come to the Hyattsville Branch to visit the Maryland Room, a special collection of over 8,000 books, pamphlets, clippings, maps, microfilm, magazines and newspapers dedicated to the history and current events of the county and the state.

Scannx Book ScanCenter: A Special Collections Asset

Prince George County Libraries installed its first Scannx Book ScanCenter in the Maryland Room at the Hyattsville Branch in June 2012. The collection is heavily used, but non-circulating, and located in a restricted-access room. Originally, says Maryland Room Librarian Colleen Formby, the purpose of the Book ScanCenter was to facilitate access to the often delicate materials in the collection, and it has proved to be a perfect match for the materials and those who use them.

Formby, who is also head of the Prince George County Library's Special Collections Committee, particularly likes the Book ScanCenter's patented book-edge scanner design, which allows the page to lie flat on the glass so it captures a full, clear image all the way to the edge of the scanner bed, with no black gutter, no distortion, and no need to press the book flat against the glass.

"The book edge holds the book nicely," says Formby. "It's a nice way to put the book on there without having to totally flatten it, which is not good for books. Ten percent of our materials are from 1890 and earlier, with the earliest from 1790. Even as late as the 1920s, that is not an age of good paper, and you don't want cracked spines."

In fact, Formby has been so pleased with the scanner that she plans to recommend getting one for each of the County's special collections: The Selima Room at the Bowie Branch, which features materials pertaining to thoroughbred breeding and racing; The Sojourner Truth Room at the Oxon Hill Branch, with over 15,000 books on African American history and culture; and the Tugwell Room at the branch in Greenbelt, which details the unique history of that town, completely planned and built in the 1930s as part of President Roosevelt's New Deal. She would also like to see one available for general use in the new South Bowie Branch.

"It's such a good amenity to have," she says. "If nothing else, I really think they should have one in the Sojourner Truth Room. That focuses on Black studies and we are a predominantly African American community, so it gets a fair amount of use."

Formby is also thinking about new uses for the Book ScanCenter to improve access to special library materials. "One of the things I've talked about was that this was a way to scan some of the archival photos I had and upload them to the Maryland Room portion of the website so they would be accessible to people doing research from home," she says.

Beyond Special Collections

So far, the scanner is getting used most by those working in the Maryland Room, but the library does make it available to all patrons. And more and more of them are asking to scan things.

"It's closed up in the Maryland Room, and it was placed there for that purpose, but its secondary purpose is for anyone who comes in and needs to scan something," says Formby. "People ask several times a week, and we just take them right in and help them with it." They are scanning resumes, genealogical material, documents and pictures.

The response has been overwhelmingly positive, both from visitors who use the scanner and from the staff. They particularly like the easy-to-use touch screen that guides the user through the scanning process, start to finish. Large friendly buttons prompt them to choose a black and white or color scan; adjust the image quality; name the file; and scan to PDF, searchable PDF, Word, JPEG, TIFF, or PNG formats.

"This scanner is a dream," says Formby. "It is so easy to use. People today are so used to their smart phones that they've gotten used to touch screens. So they get it immediately." In addition, she says, "they love the fact that you don't have to put the paper in any particular place or anything," since the Book ScanCenter automatically

detects and selects the material on the scanning bed, then allows the user to crop the area to scan.

Some staff members – including Formby – say they are starting to use the Book ScanCenter for tasks they once performed on a more conveniently located All-In-One. "We have people that answer all the e-mail reference questions for the county – everything from putting a book on reserve to finding an obituary," says Formby. "I usually use the (scanner) here at my desk, but I have found myself just using the Scannx. It's so handy and it does such a good job."

Tapping into Book ScanCenter's Full Potential

Concerned about managing the amount of time patrons spent using the Book ScanCenter, the library decided to set it up to scan to flash drive only. Scans are free, and there are flash drives available for people to use within the library. But other features that allow users to send scans to e-mail, fax, print, smart-phone or tablet are currently disabled.

"We have a huge number of people who come in to use computers for web searches, Facebook, job searches, etc." says Formby "There are 40 computers in the building and still sometimes people will be waiting an hour. We use time management software, so people use their library card to make a reservation for the next available computer. That's a big reason we wanted this only as a scanner set up to save to flash drive. And we thought it was easier to have it securely locked away."

As the staff becomes more familiar with Scannx's easy-to-use scanner and touch-screen, that may change.

"We are due to be renovated in a year and a half, so in 2013 you may see a Maryland Room that's more open, which might make the scanner more visually accessible," says Formby.

In addition, she may explore some of the Scannx system's powerful options to determine how they can best use the Book ScanCenter to meet the cutting-edge demands of the next generation of library patrons.

"Younger people are growing up with all this technology, so they expect it to be there," she says. "I certainly never had to do a PowerPoint when I was in sixth grade. We are a public library, and (the scanner) is a public service that's put here."

She is cautious, however, about balancing the availability of services with the need to manage library resource for all patrons. For example, she says, "We get asked for fax services everyday. So I might look into that to see how it works. But based on the way our computers get used around here, I'm not sure I want to see it used as a fax machine. For now, for our usage, it does exactly what we want it to do and it's fabulous."

Despite her resource-management concerns, Formby sees the Scannx Book ScanCenter as a real asset to the Prince George County Library system, and would recommend it to public libraries everywhere. "The biggest thing that keeps coming up is how easy it is to use, and how it does beautiful crisp scans," she says. "If it were up to me, I'd put one in every branch."