

## New Jersey libraries are valuable resources for economic recovery

Written by

**NORMA BLAKE**

Jul 21, 2011|

Nine months ago, thanks to a \$5.1 million federal Broadband Technology Opportunity grant, the New Jersey State Library implemented a series of steps to enable libraries throughout New Jersey to better assist our unemployed and underemployed residents and their families.

As unemployment in our state skyrocketed, going from 4.5 percent in 2007 to 9.6 percent in 2010, and the jobless faced the reality of cutting back on unessential commodities, such as Internet service, our libraries saw an unprecedented influx of customers, needing not only the basic services libraries have been providing for years, but also more specialized services, as well, especially computer technology. With little reduction in the unemployment rate today, that needs remains critical, especially when you consider that in 70 percent of our communities, the only free Internet access for these residents on a tight budget is their local library.

Longtime employees who were laid off suddenly found the job-searching

landscape had changed. Job listings in newspapers were practically nonexistent; paper resumes were a thing of the past; applying for unemployment was online and knowing how to use a computer was essential. Our librarians found that many of the thousands who lost their jobs had no computer skills. They were frustrated, upset, embarrassed and scared, but found their local library was a safety zone with friendly, reassuring people who would help them cross the bridge to computer literacy.

Our libraries adapted very quickly to this changing demographic. They went from having customers with computer skills to having customers who needed to learn computer skills to search for and apply for jobs. According to a survey conducted by the State Library in 2010, more than 78 percent of N.J. library directors said the top priority of their staff was to help job seekers.

One of the first things the State Library implemented with BTOP funding was making the Learning Express Job & Career

Advertisement



**Protect Your Home  
with ADT!**

**ADT AUTHORIZED DEALER**

**Click Here  
to Learn More!**

Print Powered By  **FormatDynamics**

Accelerator available online at all New Jersey libraries. This tool offers access to millions of active job and internship postings, and provides a wide array of valuable information, such as predicted job growth by field, reviews of today's hottest careers, model resumes based on job titles and experience levels, interactive computer training courses, and eBooks for further skill-building and study. Since making it available last October, the 4,500 people who registered at the site have created 1,350 resumes and conducted almost 7,000 job searches.

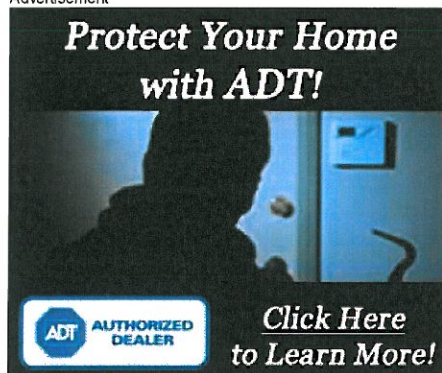
Rona Bannered, senior reference librarian and computer instructor at the Lawrenceville Branch of the Mercer County Library, told me her customers love the program because it's easy to use and has everything they need in one place. She added that the 15 public computers at the branch are in constant use; that's a story repeated by librarians all across our state.

To better serve job seekers even further, this past spring we added public access computers at 124 libraries; we are upgrading broadband connectivity at 79 libraries, and providing job search assistance, employment skills, work-force development programs and other online resources at all 365 libraries across the state. Another part of the BTOP program has a consortium of New Jersey's community colleges providing training for job seekers in basic computer usage, resume development using MS Word, Internet Job Searching and Email Essentials for Job Seekers. To date, almost 2,700 people have taken these classes.

Another online resource, which just started July 1, is Gale's Career Transitions, a complete, self-paced application that walks job seekers through the entire process from assessing strengths and interests, to exploring new opportunities, to ultimately improving the chances of landing a job.

As these tough economic times linger, we are all making sacrifices, and it is no different for the State Library and our local libraries. At a time when library usage is at an all-time high, libraries are struggling to maintain the services their communities demand with reduced funding. With more than 170,000 customers every day, last year library computers were used more than 11 million times and residents borrowed 64 million items. It might surprise many that libraries have become a hub for people looking for jobs -- to upgrade their computer skills, to advance their education, or keep updated on the latest developments in their fields. The idea of the library being just books, magazines and newspapers is an

Advertisement



**Protect Your Home  
with ADT!**

**ADT AUTHORIZED DEALER**

**Click Here  
to Learn More!**

Print Powered By  FormatDynamics™

anachronism. Our libraries now offer so much more, while still providing a quiet, distraction-free place for studying, learning and exploring.

**Norma Blake**

**N.J. State Librarian**

**Norma E. Blake, of Moorestown has been New Jersey State Librarian since 2001. In 2008, she was named by "Library Journal" as National Librarian of the Year, which is considered one of the most prestigious national awards in the profession. The former Girl Scout was selected as a 2008 Woman of Distinction by the Girl Scouts of Central & Southern NJ, and currently serves as president of the Association of Specialized and Cooperative Library Agencies.**

[Get Listed Here](#)

Ads by Pulse 360

**New York Drivers. July 2011.**

If you live in New York, you need to learn about this loophole to get insurance for \$9!  
ConsumerAutoSource.com

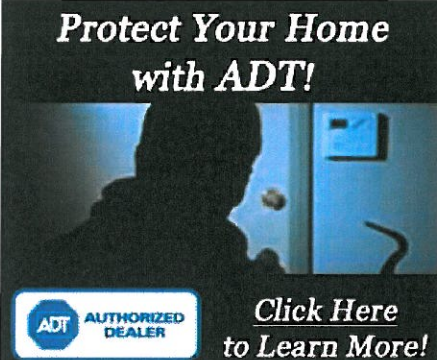
**Banks Write Off Billions in Credit Debt**

See If You Qualify for Debt Settlement!  
www.LowerMyBills.com/Debt

**Unemployed or Laid Off?**

Go Back to School. Take College Classes Online, On Your Own Time.  
www.YourDegree.com

Advertisement



**Protect Your Home  
with ADT!**

**Click Here  
to Learn More!**

ADT AUTHORIZED DEALER

Print Powered By  FormatDynamics™