Written by Mark Jaeger
Wednesday, 06 October 2010 18:44

Loaned laptops will allow hands-on access during workplace classes

Ever since the nation's economy took a serious downward turn, public libraries have noticed a surge in use among job hunters.

In response to that trend, the Oscar Grady Library is offering some high-tech assistance to patrons looking for work.

The library is hosting three job-related classes this month, using a bank of five laptop computers on a two-week loan from the Eastern Shores Library System.

The computers and a linked projector were secured by the system through a grant. They can be used by any member library in Ozaukee or Sheboygan county.

The job hunter's series starts with a session at 5:30 p.m. Thursday, Oct. 7, on building a resume and posting it on the Job Center of Wisconsin web site.

A class covering resources and techniques for online job searching is planned for 5:30 p.m. Monday, Oct. 11.

A final class on the LinkedIn professional networking site will be offered at 6:30 p.m. Thursday, Oct. 14. The session will help job seekers tap past and present work colleagues.

All of the sessions will be led by staff members from the state's Department of Workforce Development.

Library Director Jen Gerber said the sessions are a response to what she sees as a growing need by patrons.

“Every day we have a lot of people coming in to use our computers to access online job resources. Oftentimes, they need one-on-one assistance which we simply are not able to provide,”
Gerber said.

Seeing the need, she approached the Department of Workforce Development about offering the classes. The option became even more appealing when the Eastern Shores loaned laptops became available.

A connected projector will give a large-screen view of what the instructor is doing, as they work on their own computers.

“The computers will give patrons hands-on experience during the classes, rather than simply sitting in a room and listening to someone talk,” Gerber said.

While the computers are available, library staff member Kim Becker will also offer two hands-on classes on the use of the EasiCat catalog system.

Those sessions will be at 10 a.m. Friday, Oct. 8, and 6:30 p.m. Wednesday, Oct. 13.

In another example of expanding technology, Gerber said the library’s home page also gives computer-savvy patrons free access to the Learning Express, a Web site that allows users to take
practice tests for the ACT and SAT college placement exams. The tests are immediately graded, giving students instant feedback.

The same site allows patrons to take practice tests for various professional qualification exams, including postal workers and firefighters.

Gerber said the emphasis on technology will continue Friday, Oct. 22, when the library is closed for an in-service day that will give the staff experience in working with a host of new devices.

“We are calling it ‘Gadget Day,’ when staff members get to use Kindles, Nooks, iPhones and other digital devices,” Gerber said.

That exposure will allow staff members to better respond to questions from patrons, especially when trying to download digital books and music that are now available from the library’s Web site.

“The bottom line is if you don’t respond to technology, you will become obsolete,” Gerber said.

In the future, she said she hopes to again use the loaned laptops to teach patrons the basics of how to use applications like Microsoft Office and PowerPoint.

“There are people who come into the library and say they’ve lost their job after 20 years and don’t have any idea how to put together a resume on a computer,” Gerber said.

To reserve a place at any of the scheduled classes, call the library at 284-6022 or get additional details at the circulation desk.

OSCAR GRADY LIBRARY Director Jen Gerber sat amid the array of laptop computers on loan from the Eastern Shores Library System for a series of job-searching classes.
Photo by Mark Jaeger