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6-Day Library Service To Continue



Photo William Alatraste City Council

Council Speaker Christine C. Quinn, together with Libraries Subcommittee Chair Vincent J. Gentile, reads to youngsters at a local library.

BY RICHARD GENTILVISO

After negotiations between the City Council and Mayor Michael Bloomberg, six-day library service has been saved by a restoration of \$16 million to libraries in the city's final \$59 billion budget.

A proposed cut of \$25 million from the Fiscal Year 2009 budget to the city's three public library systems; Queens, New York (Manhattan, The Bronx, and Staten Island) and Brooklyn, would have forced a reduction in library hours. However, with the additional funding, Council Speaker Christine Quinn announced, six-day library service will continue.

"While mostly everyone supports libraries, few recognize the important role they play in the context of workforce and in the community," Quinn said in a July 11 press release. "Preserving library service to six full days will continue to give all New Yorkers the chance to access an array of services from which they can benefit."

Since the restoration of six-day service in 2007 for the first time in six years, the number of people visiting one of the 62 branches of the Queens Library on Saturday has almost doubled, going from an average of 25,000 to 45,000 patrons. In that time, Queens Library circulated more than 2.5 million books, CDs, DVDs, and other digital media on Saturdays—a 62.5 percent increase.

"We are a lifeline," said Queens Library Director of Government and Community Affairs James Van Bramer in a July 16 *Daily News* report.

In addition to six-day service at all 62 Queens Library branches, three branches; Richmond Hill, Kew Gardens Hills, and Central Library (Jamaica) are open on Sundays from noon to 5 p.m.

Circulation at Queens Library branches during Fiscal Year 2008 (from July 1 to June 30) set a new record for American libraries, again, at 22,800,011 items, an increase of 8.40 percent.

All of the New York Public Library's (NYPL) 87 branches and four research libraries are open six days a week as well while 10 branches are open Sundays. Brooklyn libraries are reporting their highest levels of service in 40 years.

The three library systems combined operate more than 200 local library branches that provide more than 65 million books and other items to city residents.

"We're very pleased we'll be able to maintain our current level of six-day-a-week service and that the elected officials have recognized our value," NYPL director of public relations Herb Scher said in *American Libraries*.

Although the money is in place this year, concerns for future budgets remain. The difficult economic outlook is reflected in an increase in city spending of 1.6 percent for Fiscal 2009 with a projected inflation rate of 2.7 percent for the coming year.

For the three public libraries, the total budget is \$319.5 million. Last year, libraries received \$314.8 million. The \$4.7 million increase is a miniscule 1.5 percent.

"When the economy is bad, libraries are more important than ever," Van Bramer said in the *Daily News* report.

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