

Patrick Golden

Knows How to Draw A Crowd

by Greg Lilly, Lifestyle Editor



Concerts, lectures, films, art exhibits and books, that's what the Williamsburg Regional Library offers the community. Patrick Golden, Program Services Director, helps coordinate the events for the library.

"We're unique in that we have the theater space," Patrick explains as he describes the 268 seat theater. "That's the foresight of the people back in the 1970s and '80s that the library needed a cultural cen-

ter."

It is a true cultural center that brings a wide array of programs to the community. Residents

and visitors gather at the library for more than books. They gather for entertainment, art, and education.

"Last year we had about 40,000 people use the theater," Patrick says. "We have everything from sales meetings to concerts, [and] church services to plays. There are a lot of events going on at the library that are organized by

the library, then there are other things that go on that the library co-sponsors, and then there

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are other times the library rents the space out to groups that hold their own independent events.”

Patrick worked for NASA before joining the library's staff. “I did program development for NASA and I really wasn't looking to leave, but this opportunity encompassed a lot of my background and required less travel.” He had also worked as a museum administrator with experience in exhibit organization. “The ability to have an exhibit space and to do public programs attracted me to the position as well,” he says.

Some of his most popular programs are the concert series. The Dewey Decibel

Concert Series hosts folk, acoustic folk and jazz performers. “I get two or three requests a day from booking agents asking us to consider their acts,” Patrick says. “We can't do them all, but we have about thirty concerts a

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- Patrick Golden

year under that

banner. It's been very successful. Last year, about 3,500 people attended those Dewey Decibel Concerts.” That ticketed series helps support some of the free concerts. Patrick ensures that there are plenty of free offerings. “We want to make sure that everyone in the community has a chance to experience the arts.”

Serving up arts for the community can be daunting and fare for criticism, but Patrick's fifteen years at the library and his past programming experience have helped him gauge the public's appetite for entertainment. “It's a combination of gut feeling, previous experience, and feedback from the public,” he explains. “That helps us establish what we present.”

In addition to the concerts, he and the library's divisions produce events like the Thursday Afternoon Film Series, the Celtic Film Series that is co-sponsored with the local chapters of the St. Andrew Benevolent Association and the Ladies Ancient Order of Hibernians, and the once a month Italian Film Series.

The Great Decisions lectures are co-sponsored by the League of Women Voters. “These are full-house lectures,” Patrick says. “The experts brought in attract a lot of people with their lectures on topics of global interests.”

Co-sponsorships like the film series and the Great Decisions lectures help Patrick and his team tap the talents of those organizations,

their reach into the community, and their expertise in different subjects. "We're lucky that we have the venue to present the programs of different groups," he says. "It's a good partnership."

His view of the library as a cultural center grows from this model of co-sponsoring. "It's useful for a couple of reasons," he explains. "First, it gives us access to resources and the group's connections to communities that we may not have; and secondly, it gives us a built-in, specific audience." Attracting that audience to the library helps expose them to the other available programs. That's part of Patrick's strategy to build word-of-mouth buzz about the library's entertainment options.

"The library is a neutral space," he says, "and allows people from all backgrounds to feel as if it's their space, a space to experience something they might not have ventured out to discover."

Just outside the theater space, Patrick and his team have the Williamsburg Library Gallery. This is a multipurpose space. It's the lobby for the theater, it's the gathering place for receptions and other functions, and it's a waiting area. "We use the walls for displaying art," he adds. "Visual artists submit their art for consideration. We schedule anywhere from six to ten exhibits a year."

The gallery space attracts a lot of interest from library patrons and people who stop in specifically for the art exhibit. "People enjoy it," Patrick says, "and they bring their friends and visitors by too." His office is close by and sometimes he hears the comments of people showing the gallery and the theater to their visitors. "That's very gratifying," he says. "I mean with all the things in Williamsburg that residents can show their visitors that they come here to show the theater and gallery. Wow, that makes us feel great."

He says the most rewarding part of his position is those types of responses. "When they come up to us and say they love what the library does for the community," he adds, "that's the best part for me. And people compliment us when they say they know what goes on at the library will be a quality program." That's the most satisfying aspect of his job.

Not only has the community recognized the cultural and entertainment value Patrick's programs add to the library, but the programs have gained national attention as well. The Library Journal has a system of ranking libraries around the country. "We're very fortunate that for the past two years we've received a 5-star ranking which is the highest," Patrick says. "We're the only 5-star library in Virginia. The statistic that sets us apart from the other libraries is our per capita program attendance. Our number is about three times that of other libraries. Only three other libraries in all of Virginia receive a star rating and we're the only 5 star. That's very gratifying for the programming that all the divisions do here."

Bringing a wide range of entertainment options to the Williamsburg area has been a goal during Patrick during his fifteen years at the library. The recognition by his peers and by residents of the community make all the hard work worthwhile. NDN

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