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WYLIE

Investing in library services

City expands hours, adds staff to library in hopes of meeting community needs

By JULISSA TREVIÑO
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During Wylie budget discussions last year, something that residents consistently wanted was longer hours at Smith Public Library.

Beginning this year, Wylie's only library has expanded its schedule by six additional hours and added staff to meet growing needs and a community demand for accessibility.

"Mayor and council were really generous and understanding in giving us more hours and then making sure we had enough people," said Library Director Rachel Orozco.

The library now opens at 10 a.m. Monday through Saturday, whereas before, opening hours changed depending on the day. The foyer opens at 9 a.m. with seating and access to Wi-Fi.

Orozco said the new schedule is meant to accommodate more residents. It adds hours mainly in the mornings.

The changes come years after the library opened up in a new space in 2011. Wylie Mayor Eric Hogue said the additional hours had always been planned but that the city wanted to make sure it had funds for staff.

"We're trying not to bite off more than we could chew," he said. "We already had funding for [the new building] but we couldn't get more staff immediately."

To accommodate the new schedule, the library has added seven part-time positions.

The new hours and staff come thanks to a budget increase as a result of last year's budget discussions, during which the Library Board and Teen Library Council advocated for additional funding.

The library budget increase for the changes amounts to \$170,000. Its cur-



Photos by ALLISON SLOMOWITZ/special contributor

Davi Stoker, 3, plays a game at Smith Public Library's Early Learning Station in Wylie. Since its 2011 opening, the library has become a popular place to meet.

rent budget is \$1.68 million, said Wylie City Manager Mindy Manson.

"In a way it seems like a lot of money, but they do so much," she said.

She said the biggest bump in the library's budget came between 2010 and 2011 when the library moved. In 2011, the library moved from a 7,000 square-foot building into a 44,000-square-foot library at the Wylie Municipal Complex.

Becoming a meeting place

Since the 2011 opening, the library has become an increasingly popular place to meet in Wylie. On a weekday morning, there are storytimes for children, adults studying in the quiet room and parents homeschooling their children.

"You could say this is the crown jewel of the city," Hogue said. "It's a point of pride."

Some library patrons are still adjusting to the new hours.

Plano resident Phaedra Shaltanis

said she was actually disappointed with the new hours on Wednesday.

"We are unhappy that they just moved their hours to 10 [on Wednesdays] instead of 9," she said.

She visits Smith Public Library in Wylie regularly as a place to homeschool her children after dropping off her daughter for class, and the later opening time has been inconvenient.

But the new hours are an improvement from the old schedule which was "not consistent at all," Orozco said. "People would come in expecting us to be open, and we weren't."

The library hosted more than 200,000 visitors last year. It accommodates more than 35,000 library card holders in a city of about 44,000 residents. (Because Smith Public Library doesn't have a residency requirement, it also serves people who live outside of Wylie.)

"Over the last three years the library has experienced tremendous growth in



Phaedra Shaltanis home-schools her children, Athan, 9, (from left), Sebastian, 8, and Amrose, 12, at Smith Public Library. Wylie's only library has expanded its schedule by six additional hours and added staff to meet growing needs and a community demand for accessibility.

attendance, circulation and programming, prompting the expanded hours," said Wylie spokesman Craig Kelly.

Orozco said she was grateful that the city has continued to make a commitment to library services. She said the budget over the years has also allowed the library to make improvements to what it offers, like adding eBooks and downloadable music. The library now has about 90,000 books, DVDs, eBooks and other materials, Orozco said.

Looking ahead

The library will host its second annual poetry festival, ROAR@SPL, in April; it offers numerous summer activities for children, computer classes and a business center for adults, a place for teens, and regular storytime events for young children.

Orozco said the library is working on other plans this year, too.

"One of the projects that we're doing is [applying for] grants to do an oral history project to record our citizens' stories," she said. "It's never been done before [at the library] as a big concerted effort."

David Elderbroom of Friends of the Smith Public Library said he hopes the library eventually moves into a seven-day schedule but that the changes are a first positive step.

"It's taken a long time just to get additional morning hours," he said.

Library Youth Services Supervisor Ofilia Barrera said the new hours are already working to some extent, but she's hopeful they'll attract more people as they get used to the new schedule.

"We were missing a huge section of the population that wasn't able to make it on our previous hours," she said. "I have a feeling we're going to get

SMITH PUBLIC LIBRARY

300 Country Club Road, Building 300, Wylie
Library Director Rachel Orozco
Contact: 972-516-6250 or
libinfo@wylietexas.gov

NEW LIBRARY HOURS

10 a.m. to 8 p.m. Monday, Tuesday, Thursday
10 a.m. to 6 p.m. Wednesday
10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Friday and Saturday

a lot more people who wouldn't come otherwise."

Neighborsgo reporter Julissa Treviño can be reached at 214-977-8023.



Smith Public Library's youth services reference assistant Jenn Delmar-Rollings looks on after helping Asher Ivey, 3, find a Pokemon book in the children's section. The library hosted more than 200,000 visitors last year. It accommodates more than 35,000 library card holders in a city of about 44,000 residents.