

### Partnership with county system is long overdue



There have been fewer things more important to me throughout my years than public libraries. As a wee lad, I would spend hours at the local public library, plowing through homework assignments and devouring books, newspapers, and magazines on everything from the news of 1984's Reagan/Mondale presidential campaigns to Kansas City Royals box scores. Even while living in the Dominican Republic and Haiti, I would seek out the local English-language libraries operated by the U.S. embassies.

Closer to home, with a collection of 70,000 titles and now 6000 e-books, Brockway Memorial Library has proved to be a popular village amenity, furiously protected by the 100-plus daily visitors and 8000 card holders. That's not bad for a village of 10,000.

Beyond meeting the literary needs of village residents, Brockway hosts a full schedule of programming for young people and adults alike, ranging from puppet shows to Harry Potter releases, from book readings to "People of Color" discussions, from sewing to "Poses 'n' Print Yoga" classes, from artisan fairs to history walks.

The Miami Shores Brockway Memorial Library dates to 1949 and is in part the result of the generosity of its namesake, George A. Brockway, a Northeast industrialist who wintered in Miami Beach. Over the years, the library has expanded and modernized to adapt to the digital age, with added e-books, free Wi-Fi, and now the digitizing of its archives section. On the horizon is adding Ancestry.com genealogy service, as well as RBdigital, a portal for magazines, movies, and music.

## Brockway Library and Beyond

Written by John Ise, BT Contributor  
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The physical structure of Brockway embodies a good deal of village charm. An open reading area, drenched in natural sunlight, is lined with books, magazines, newspapers (*Biscayne Times* prominently displayed), and comfy sofa chairs.

Patrons can read underneath an imposing chandelier and two fireplaces (unfortunately, they're sealed; evidently, roaring fires near books is frowned upon) in a bit old-Florida ambience.

Brockway the building will soon grow larger. Years of fundraising that successfully netted \$275,000 from individual and corporate donations, and a recently completed sewer system hookup have poised Brockway to begin its most significant expansion in decades. The northern half of Brockway will be expanded by 1400 square feet this year to provide added space for more children and youth programming.

If there's a quibble with Brockway, it's that the library exists as almost an isolated island. There is no Brockway Library *system*. Miami Shores, along with Surfside and Bal Harbour, is among the very few of the county's 34 municipalities that maintains no formal relationship to Miami-Dade County Library system. This was by choice.

This means that if you, like me, want to get a Miami-Dade library card, you'll need to pay (as I did) an additional \$100 annually for the privilege. In contrast, other municipalities that maintain their own libraries -- North Miami, North Miami Beach, and Hialeah -- have reciprocal borrowing agreements with the county, where those city cardholders can obtain a county library card and vice versa.

Brockway is just one single, solitary library whereas Miami-Dade is a system of 50 linked library branches. Brockway maintains a collection of 70,000 titles, whereas the greater library system hosts 5.5 million titles.

But other than the limited ecosystem in which it exists, there are no real deficiencies at Brockway. In partnership with the Southeast Florida Library Association's digital consortium, it has access to about 6000 e-books -- again, in contrast, Miami-Dade has 35,000 e-book titles.

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(Publishers reportedly charge libraries about three to five times the price for e-book titles over deeply discounted print books, even though e-books are cheaper to produce and distribute. I think I smell a racket, but I digress.)

Beyond books, I've taken advantage of advice from the *BT*'s Mark Sell to use my county library card to get around multiple paywalls (see “

[It's So Much More Than Books](#),” January 2018). Via the county's library account with RBdigital, I can read 272 magazines for free on my I-phone and tablets. A pricey \$150 annual subscription to

*The Economist*

drops to \$0. I can get my nerd on, perusing Black Panther comics...er...I mean “graphic novels” via the Hoopla app. I get my musical groove on, jamming the air guitar-accompanied and my trademark “white-man's overbite,” with Freegal, where one can stream or download literally millions of songs. All free.

None of this is meant as a critique of Brockway. A library with an operating budget in the mid-\$400,000 range can hardly be compared with the bells and whistles of Miami-Dade's \$83 million behemoth. And really, it's the little things at Brockway, the personalized aspects that make me value it.

Gobsmacked was I to find Brockway open a mere two days after Hurricane Irma. With no power and only sunlight illuminating the interior, sweating librarians manually checked out a few books for me and my kids. Listening to how librarians had to find care for children and boil drinking water, I felt a pang of Catholic guilt well up in my gut.

Yet soon we may be able to have it all. In the past few months, the library's board of trustees has heard from Miami-Dade Libraries and the Southeast Florida Library Information Network (library systems of distant counties and universities) about entering into reciprocal borrowing agreements with one or both systems.

There is a lingering question of how an agreement with Miami-Dade would affect workloads of Brockway's ten employees. Residents of neighboring Biscayne Park, El Portal, and unincorporated pockets who have county library cards would now be eligible to get a Brockway card. But to my mind, opening the library door to neighboring communities is a wonderful and magnanimous gesture.

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Libraries broadly provide the raw ingredients of civic education and empowerment. As the Public Library Association's statement of principles, written in 1982 puts it: "Free access to ideas and information, a prerequisite to the existence of a responsible citizenship, is as fundamental to America as are the principles of freedom, equality and individual rights.... Public libraries continue to be of enduring importance to the maintenance of our free democratic society. There is no comparable institution in American life."

Here's hoping that a reciprocal borrowing agreement can be arrived at that preserves local control and Brockway's hometown feel while plugging Villagers into the expansive amenities of broader library systems.

As a famed scientist once noted, society's general well-being depends on extending the reach and heft of our libraries: "I think the health of our civilization, the depth of our awareness about the underpinnings of our culture, and our concern for the future can all be tested by how well we support our libraries." -- [Carl Sagan](#) , [Cosmos](#)

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