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HOT

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## Library will get creative with makerspace

By Suzi Nelson Nov 8, 2017



WHAT'S IN STORE: Textiles, art prints, wooden boxes and 3D printed items are among the items created by Ashland Public Library staff during training for the “makerspace” equipment the library will host as part of a state-wide program. (Photo provided by Ashland Public Library)

**ASHLAND** – Creative juices will be flowing as the Ashland Public Library transforms into a “makerspace” later this month.

Library Director Heather St.Clair said the library was one of 18 chosen as the initial participants in Nebraska’s Library Innovation Studios: Transforming Rural Communities project to create makerspaces in public libraries throughout the state.

The project is funded by a grant from the Nebraska Library Commission. The library commission received a National Leadership Grant of over \$500,000 for the project, which is a partnership with the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, Nebraska Innovation Studio, Nebraska Extension, Regional Library Systems and local public libraries.

The word “makerspace” is a relatively new term coined to describe collaborative spaces where do-it-yourself projects are made. Tools, equipment, training and even some materials may be provided by the makerspace to allow participants to learn new skills.

During the three-year program, public libraries in Nebraska will host the makerspace for up to five months. The goal is to stimulate creativity and innovation, facilitate entrepreneurship and spark local economic development, according to a press release from Gov. Pete Ricketts.

“This partnership demonstrates how our Nebraska communities can use technology and education to empower community residents to create, learn and invent,” Ricketts said. “By expanding the skills of the workforce in our communities, supporting entrepreneurs and encouraging lifelong learning, this partnership reinforces our vibrant business climate and supports community development.”

St.Clair and her staff have spent a good deal of time preparing for the arrival of the makerspace equipment. The official opening date has not been set, but will be sometime in late-November.

The makerspace will be divided into two components – permanent stations and mobile stations.

The six permanent stations will include equipment that is calibrated and cannot be moved from place to place.

These stations will include equipment like a Makerbot replicator and 3D laser printer, laser cutter, vinyl cutter, sewing machine, embroidery machine and Computer Numerical Control (CNC) router. They will be located on one side of the community meeting room.

The permanent stations will be open during scheduled hours to help ensure trainers are available.

The hours are Monday, 9:30 a.m. to 6:30 p.m., Tuesday by appointment, Wednesday 9:30 a.m. to 12 p.m. and 4:30 p.m. to 7:30 p.m., Friday 9:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. and Saturday 1:30 p.m. to 4:30 p.m. On Thursdays the stations will be open during the youth tech clubs' scheduled times.

The nine mobile stations will have equipment or tools that can be used in various areas of the library. Examples of a mobile station would be robotics kits or photography and video creation tools.

“They will be available whenever people ask for them,” said St.Clair.

Some of the mobile station equipment may also be checked out and taken from the library for a short time.

People using the makerspace may bring their own materials, or some will be provided. The library will purchase some materials, while St.Clair is still working on gathering donated items like wood or fabric.

The library will be able to offer a variety of materials at no cost to the user, while they may charge a small fee for others.

“Some materials here can possibly be purchased or used for free,” St.Clair said.

The makerspace will be open to the public, including people who do not have an Ashland Public Library card. St. Clair said because this is the only makerspace in Saunders County, they are including non-card holders. The closest library with a makerspace is Plattsmouth Public Library in Cass County.

“We really do want to be very inclusive with it,” St.Clair said.

However, if demand is high, the staff may set aside some scheduled times for local library patrons, St.Clair added.

The library staff will be trained to operate all of the equipment, but St.Clair is also looking for volunteers to teach skills or mentor people.

“One of the focuses of the studio is to really encourage community participation,” she said.

Volunteers may include adults, but high school students are also encouraged to become trainers. St.Clair said they can count the hours they work towards volunteer hours needed for scholarship applications or membership in organizations like the National Honor Society.

Some of the stations will require the volunteers obtain certification before they are allowed to teach, St.Clair said. The volunteers would then train the public by holding classes or demonstrations, providing one-on-one training and assisting the public when the makerspace is open.

“We’re looking for anybody who’s interested in training and helping people with the equipment,” she said.

Classes on makerspace equipment may also be lined up, but details are still being worked out, St.Clair said.

Volunteers are also needed for the community action team, which will help recruit trainers, promote the makerspace and plan an open house and showcase.

An open house must be held within three weeks of the opening of the makerspace, St.Clair said. The showcase will take place at the end of the makerspace tenure at the library. There the community will have a chance to show off the items they created with the tools and equipment.

Even though this makerspace will only be in Ashland for five months, St.Clair hopes to acquire equipment and tools to create a permanent makerspace in Ashland.

“I’d like to be able to continue to provide that kind of access if there’s a demand for it,” she said.

Because the library gave up some of its meeting areas for the makerspace, including half of the large community meeting room, another location may be needed for a permanent makerspace.

St.Clair is assessing whether or not the library would have space in other areas. They may have to look outside of the library to other places in the community, she added.

The Ashland library was moving in the direction of a makerspace before being chosen for the state program. St.Clair has purchased a Cricut cutting machine, which is widely used in crafting and scrapbooking. Ozobots and Lego Mindstorm robot kits were ordered after several young library patrons requested such items.

St.Clair said many libraries have been adding creative activities in recent years.

“It’s been a gradual trend that I’ve heard about in larger libraries,” she said.

It is part of the evolution of libraries from simply housing books to bridging the digital divide.

“Libraries are becoming less about reading about other peoples’ ideas but also creating their own,” said St.Clair.