

## Malad Teens Benefit from Wal-Mart Grant

Teens in Malad say the library is no longer just for “little kids” and are finding all kinds of resources there that meet their needs. The **Oneida County Library District** was one of 14 recipients of Wal-Mart mini-grants this past year. They have been using their \$10,000 grant award to beef up programs and resources for the 12 to 18 age group.

“We have had a lot of success with our youth from birth to about age 11, but were having a tough time interesting our young adults,” Technology Specialist Kathy Kent said. They did have a strong teen summer reading program that has been active for the past two years. The grant program aims to build on this successful model by including more after-school programs and reaching teens who may not have been inside the library for years. The idea is to get more kids in the library and introduce them to what the library offers. A revamped “Teen Central” space lets them have their own space in the library where they can learn and enjoy resources designed to appeal to them.



The library was lucky to tap into the skills of Scott Austin, a local IT person and father who has an active interest in reading and technology. Scott has led the teen summer group the past two years and has seen the groups grow from about 16 – 20 teens in 2008 to about 100 teenagers who would show up for the Tuesday sessions. “They liked the computer classes and learning new things, but it was also great when they started talking about the books they were reading. We have a great group of kids here who are really interested in a wide range of topics,” Scott said.

Scott has facilitated discussions or demonstrations on everything from spyware, how to use YouTube, author blogs, downloading music and books on MP3-players, and more. He has some contact with authors in the Salt Lake area and is working to get them connected in person or via the Internet to kids who are reading their books. “There’s a lot of potential with podcasts and authors’ blogs to ask questions and get an insider’s view of their work,” he said. “The nearest movie theater is an hour’s drive away, so we try to channel their energy and do some positive things.” Scott makes an effort to read as many YA books the kids are reading as possible and booktalks a lot of science-fiction and fantasy books that he enjoys. “It’s great to have someone who can be a reading role model for them, as well as having the technical background so they can ask him questions about reading or technology. We really lucked out,” Library Director Kay Caldwell said.

The library used grant funds to purchase several computers, MP3



video players, and young adult books that the teens got to help select. A newer Wii gaming system that is set up for teens to use after school and during the summer along with a chess set and other games are other selling points for making the library a teen destination.

We talked to three teen library users on a recent Friday afternoon. All three had participated in at least some of the summer programs and were enjoying the library amenities that day. Fifteen-year-old students Ben Lenoghen and Calvin Garred visit the library once or twice a month during the school year and said they like “most of the stuff they have” and the “new computers.” They spent some time on Friday playing Wii games and meeting some friends. Christopher Austin, also 15, said he likes to do his homework there because it’s nice and quiet. “I loved it when I was younger. I like the new summer programs because it gets me to read more. Now that I’m in high school I am pretty busy and it’s a lot harder to do stuff, but it’s still nice when I can get here.”



The library is partnering with the local middle and high school to encourage more teens to

participate in library programs. This month they will experiment with bussing the students to the library for special programs each Monday. “We will also have the D.A.R.E Officer in to do an Internet safety class. We always kick off any Internet program for the youth with this class. Awareness and safety is a big part of our program,” Kay said. The library is also planning some family nights for all ages to raise awareness among parents and younger siblings about the teen projects.

The library has seen circulation of their YA materials increase this year. “YA stuff is pretty hot this year,” Kay said. “But I think giving the teen points for their summer reading prizes for book recommendations and reviews helped us get more books they want to read.”

They also had good luck with 9 a.m. Tuesday morning summer programs for teens and plan on continuing that again next summer. “We provided donuts, cocoa and other refreshments and they showed up. I think some of their parents could drop them off on the way to work and then they had the rest of their day to do what they wanted. It seems like an odd time to get teens to show up--and the food, of course, helped-- but it worked for us,” Kay said.

In addition to after-school programs for teens, the library plans to do more with blogging, podcasting, a session on sound effects, research tools, YA authors, and more to meet the needs of teens in this corner of the state. Sounds like they are off to a terrific start!