

# Enriching Communities – A Shared Interest for Academic and Public Libraries

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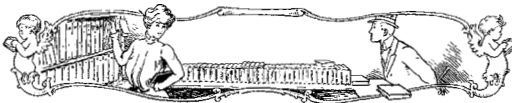
## Building Bridges

The City of Edmonton is the capital of the Province of Alberta (Canada), and boasts a growing population of over one million people. Designated the 2007 Cultural Capital of Canada, Edmonton is home to a world-class University and a vibrant public library system. Edmonton is also a city of bridges, as the city is physically bisected by the majestic North Saskatchewan River. On the south bank of the River sits the **University of Alberta**, one of Canada's foremost universities and home of the second largest academic research library in Canada. Almost directly across the river, on the north side, is found the **Stanley A. Milner (Main) Library** of the **Edmonton Public Library** (a large urban library system with 16 service locations). While separated by the river, the two institutions are building bridges of their own in terms of collaborative initiatives to serve the entire city and to enrich the broader community.

## A Shared Interest in Community

Public libraries are grounded in the cornerstone belief that they are central to the quality of life in their communities, working within a framework of community partnerships. The *Edmonton Public Library's Strategic Directions*, for instance, commit the Library to being a "participant and an active initiator in community dialogue and development" (Edmonton Public Library 9)

This community focus is echoed at the **University of Alberta**. U of A President, **Indira Samarasekera**, articulates a vision for a university with a mandate to "include the entire community in our learning enterprise" (**Samarasekera** qtd. in "The Other Home City"). She points to



the fact that, in the ongoing evolution of the academy, attention is being paid to "break[ing] down the classic stereotype of the university as an 'ivory tower' — a refuge from the concerns of the real world" (**Samarasekera** qtd. in "Bailey"). **Richard Florida**, author of *The Rise of the Creative Class*, emphasizes the central role that universities play in establishing cities as creative centers: "[U]niversities help to establish the broader quality of place of the communities in which they are located" (Florida 292).

This shared interest in enriching community, and the strong conviction of both institutions — the **Edmonton Public Library** and the **University of Alberta Libraries** — represent a challenge to explore creative opportunities in which a university library system and a public library system can collaborate as agents for addressing community challenges and building a better community.

## Provincial and Local Collaboration

In Alberta the provincial library climate contributes to this collaboration. The **Alberta Library (TAL)**, a province-wide consortium, enables initiatives that bring academic and public libraries together to enhance service to Albertans. Academic and public libraries welcome each others' clients with walk-in access to their collections through **The Alberta Library Card**, a provincial reciprocal borrowing program established in 1999 and now involving over 300 libraries. Albertans can find materials at all Alberta libraries via **TAL Online**, which enables combined searching of most library catalogues in Alberta. Another **TAL** initiative, **The Lois Hole Campus Alberta Digital Library (LHCADL)**, requires participating academic libraries to provide access to

these digital collections to community members. This initiative, named for a beloved Lieutenant Governor, brings a rich array of licensed digital resources and digitization initiatives to the community. The **LHCADL** was funded by the provincial government, as a result of concerted advocacy efforts by university library and public library leaders.

In Edmonton the university and public libraries enjoy a particularly close relationship, involving shared servers for their integrated library systems established as part of a joint migration to **Sirsi Unicorn** in 2002. This sharing of hardware provides a robust technology infrastructure which ensures access to the catalogue and ILS functions if one server is unavailable.

Staff expertise is readily shared between the two libraries, most notably at staff learning and development events. **Edmonton Public Library's** first **Professional Development Day** (2006) included an address on disaster planning, by **University of Alberta Libraries** Associate Director, **Merrill Distad**. **Edmonton Public Library's** Chief Executive Officer, **Linda C. Cook**, was recently the keynote speaker at the annual conference of **NEOS**, a library consortium spearheaded by the **University of Alberta**.

The latest collaborative initiative between the two libraries is a proposed public library service venue in the university library and public library cards for students.

This community focus, supported by the culture of our organizations, enriches (and challenges) our library service. Our libraries open their doors to each others' clients, who indeed may be the same individuals at different stages in their lives. There are certainly issues that arise for an academic library, such as sharing limited technology resources among students and community members, and dealing with the entire range of individuals in the community. However the contribution of the academy to the learning needs of the community is crucial to the development of an information-rich society. Ideally we would like to see our clients move seamlessly between our institutions throughout their lives, as each library plays to its strengths in connecting people with information and building community.

## For more information:

[www.epl.ca](http://www.epl.ca)  
[www.library.ualberta.ca](http://www.library.ualberta.ca)  
[www.lhcadl.ca](http://www.lhcadl.ca)  
[www.thealbertalibrary.ca](http://www.thealbertalibrary.ca)  
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## About the Authors

**Anne Carr-Wiggin** and **Louise Reimer** are librarians who have led peripatetic careers in public, academic, special and consortial libraries. **Anne** first thought of working in libraries while sheltering from the cold in the local library soon after moving to Canada from England. She has worked in public, college and university libraries, as well as for two library consortia. After a childhood spent haunting her local public library branch, **Louise** decided to spend her adult years as well in libraries, and has worked in virtually every facet of library operations — cataloguing, children's services, reference services, and management — with careers at the **Toronto Public Library**, the **Edmonton Public Library**, and the **University of Alberta Libraries**. **Anne** and **Louise** share an interest in exploring new avenues to foster quality service, and have most recently collaborated on the development of an integrated, single service desk in the **Humanities and Social Sciences Library** at the **University of Alberta**. They share a belief that public and academic libraries have more commonalities than differences. They also share ideas on living with teenagers. Both authors have **Facebook** pages. 🐾

**Endnotes**

**Bailey, Anne.** "Community Service Initiative Puts Theory into Action." *Express News*, 26 September 2005 <http://www.expressnews.ualberta.ca/article.cfm?id=6978>

**Edmonton Public Library.** *Enriching People's Lives: Edmonton Public Library Strategic Directions 2006-2010*. 2006 <http://www.epl.ca/ResourcesPDF/Strategic-Plan2006-10.pdf>

**Florida, Richard.** *The Rise of the Creative Class*. New York: Basic Books, 2004.  
"The Other Home City." *Augustana News*, 27 April 2006 [http://www.augustana.ca/include/auc\\_news/full\\_view.php?id=113](http://www.augustana.ca/include/auc_news/full_view.php?id=113)