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New Carlisle library stamped with 5 stars

Library Journal ranks public facility as one of nation's best.

By MARGARET FOSMOE *Tribune Staff Writer*

The New Carlisle-Olive Township Public Library has been named a "Five-Star Library" in Library Journal's latest national ratings of public libraries.

The rating system -- known as the LJ Index of Public Library Service and launched just this year -- identifies the top libraries in the United States, according to the magazine.

The latest index rates 7,268 public libraries based on measures related to public service per capita: circulation, patron visits, program attendance and public Internet use, based on 2007 data.

The top libraries are rated with five, four or three stars, based on their scores. A total of 258 libraries nationally received star ratings.

The New Carlisle-based library achieved a score of 1,902. Stephen Boggs, longtime library director in New Carlisle, was thrilled to hear of his library's top rating.

"It's awesome. It really justifies the reasons behind our new building," Boggs said, referring to the new library that opened its doors in 2002.

"We didn't really have many naysayers when we built the new building, but we didn't know how popular it would become, either," he said.

The New Carlisle library features 31 public computers: 18 personal computers, plus 13 laptop computers available for patron use within the building. Computer use is high and one of the factors that figures in the LJ rating.

The library serves the town of New Carlisle and Olive Township. Because of reciprocal borrowing agreements, residents in most of St. Joseph County and many parts of LaPorte County can borrow materials. Boggs estimates that about 75 percent of his library's patrons live in St. Joseph County and the rest in LaPorte County.

The New Carlisle library benefits from property tax dollars generated by the nearby IN/Tek and IN/Kote steel processing facilities. If not for those businesses, the library couldn't have afforded the new library building, he said.

The New Carlisle library hasn't been hit hard so far by Indiana's property tax reform.

The staff size has been reduced from 20 to 17 through attrition in the past few years, and a hiring freeze continues, but no hours, services or programming have been cut, Boggs said.

Boggs frequently visits students at Olive Township Elementary School and other schools in the New Prairie United School Corp. During his next school visit, he plans to tell students about the five-star honor. "I'll go over to the school and show them the importance of their library. Because they'll be running it someday," he said.

One other area library rated five stars in the latest Library Journal listing: Bell Memorial Public Library, in the tiny Kosciusko County town of Mentone. Bell Memorial had a score of 1,956.

The St. Joseph County Public Library also made the starred list, with a score of 850 and three stars in the new ratings. That's down from four stars in Library Journal's first such list in February. The county library's score increased, but more library districts provided data and were included in the new list.

For more information, see www.libraryjournal.com.