

# ARTS-ITORIAL

By Sue Popesku

Newcomers ask if this is the only one in town and students ask where they can sit to study. These are common questions at the Fort St. John Public Library lately as the circulation statistics climb and the library services increase.

In February, the circulation of library books was up 1,000 compared to the same month last year. According to librarian Romi Haseo, "Quite often the few desks and chairs we have are occupied with students and people reading the periodicals."

To make room for more book shelves in the cramped quarters of the Public Library, another table had to be removed. Since the paperbacks section and the video section have been expanded due to popular demand, less and less floor space is available for special activities like author tours and children's programs.

"We had 70 people crammed into a space for 20 when local author Carolyn Woodward returned to Fort St. John to promote her new book," said Romi. The Teddy Bear Story Hour must limit their attendance to no more than 25 children.

The Lion's Club is donating an electronic reading machine for the blind and visually impaired but the library staff is concerned about space.

"We had hoped to be in our new space in the Arts Centre by now," said Romi when asked what are the solutions to these problems. "Our shelves will just have to go higher as a temporary measure, but there is a limit to how high we can stack them," she explained. "We are just desperate for space."

The Public Library has extended its hours to 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. on Saturday and an extra hour on Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday, so the library is now open from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. on those days.

Romi said the Public Library feels the flood of new residents settling in town and temporary residents who would rather borrow books than buy them.

According to Romi, "Newcomers are shocked to realize that this space is the only Public Library in town."

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New residents to Fort St. John find the Artspace a welcome first stop in finding out about the community. Information on clubs, sports, arts and service clubs is repeated to newcomers at least three times a week by the manager, Pam Mroz.

The Artspace, located in the heart of Fort St. John at 10003 100th Street, has the latest contact names, registration dates and meeting times for most clubs and activities in the North Peace.

"What we don't know, we find out for the caller," said Pam in a recent interview.

Statistics show that new residents are most interested in activities for children, particularly activities for preschoolers. They ask about swimming lessons, gymnastics, hockey registration and summer programs for school age children. Mothers are also looking for ways to meet other women through some community activity.

Newcomers usually first phone the easy to catch phone number, 785-1991, before they go into the Artspace for brochures. "Usually we spend 20-30 minutes answering their questions over the telephone," said Pam. "Then we spend another 20 minutes with them when they come into the Artspace for brochures."

Occasionally other types of questions require many phone calls before an answer is found. "Where to get a Green Card, what to do with 800 pounds of cabbage and how can one find a ride to Prince George" — these are not the easy to answer questions. "If we can't find out the answers, we try to put them in contact with somebody who can," said Pam.

Tickets for most events in town are available at the Artspace, which is open from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. weekdays. Groups leaving tickets for sale at the Artspace are aired on Arts Insight each Tuesday and Thursday on CKNL and listed in the Community Events Calendars in the Alaska Highway News. This community service is free for non-profit groups and has proven convenient for residents.

These are just a few of the services that the Artspace has to offer. The Artspace Tickets and Information Centre welcomes new residents and encourages all clubs and organizations to phone in current events and meeting dates. The Artspace is located underneath Coachmen's Mens Wear, the door located next to Persnickity Books. The phone number is always as up to date as the current year, 785-1991.