

Brenda P. Sawyer
1225 East Hyde Park Boulevard
Chicago, Illinois 60615

October 5, 2011

Alderman Will Burns
435 East 35th Street
First Floor
Chicago, Illinois 60616

Dear Alderman Burns,

As the mayor looks for ways to close the anticipated budget gap in the 2012 city budget, we urge you to protect the libraries of our city. Libraries are an essential part of the fabric of our neighborhoods. Far from being just a "warehouse" of books, they have expanded their services as society's needs have expanded. Our own Blackstone Branch is the first branch opened in the city, opening its doors in 1904. Today it not only serves up books for toddlers, teenagers or the vision-impaired but it provides internet access, tutoring, book discussions, lectures, musical performances, research guidance.

This summer at Blackstone 953 children read 22,318 books as part of the summer reading program keeping our children engaged in learning. 708 participants earned t-shirts acknowledging the number of books they read during the summer. Musicians from around the city came to fill the building with music from jazz to blues, classical guitar to banjo. Local musicians and musical organizations shared their expertise: Hyde Park Suzuki Players – violinists; Claire Kim – classical guitar; Phyllis Calderon – classical piano and violin; Prof. Larry Zbikowski – guitar, mandolin, banjo; Julian "J Kwest" DeShazier – rap, and our own Maggie Brown – singing and teaching the history of jazz, blues, and spoken word.

Blackstone builds strong community through regular book discussions and lectures. Discussion of recent book releases for teenagers or adults provide community members time to reflect on a variety of themes and the City's One Book, One Chicago program, celebrating ten years, brings citizens into conversations across the city, often in libraries. The Despres Family Memorial Lectures, sponsored by Friends of Blackstone Library, presents speakers on topics like school transformation, music retrospectives, and environmental concerns. And we provide a venue for new writers to share their work.

Libraries have not become outdated or passé. To the contrary, they remain centers of culture and knowledge, places where we build our community to foster the type of society we want. These are difficult times. We must press towards a brighter future. The citizens of Chicago must be educated, energized, and connected to sources that will help them envision a new city and a library in our community is a very important source.

Sincerely,



Brenda P. Sawyer
Friends of Blackstone Library