



OCEAN COUNTY LIBRARY

Connecting People ... Building Community...Transforming Lives

SUBMITTED ARTICLE

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Ocean County Library Adds New Services For Visually Challenged

TOMS RIVER – As a teacher of literature, township resident Robert Padone has enjoyed the written word for decades. Reading had always been a major part of his life, but when his vision began to fail two years ago, he feared his ability to read would soon end.

“It was like that episode of “The Twilight Zone” where the central character, Mr. Beemer, is always reading a book and never has enough time to read all the books he wants to. Then a nuclear holocaust happens and he suddenly has all the time he needs. Tragically, his glasses break and he can’t see a thing. That is what happened to me. In a sense, I broke my glasses,” Padone said.

Not willing to accept such a loss himself, he took steps to reduce the impact of his diminished vision by going to the Toms River Branch of the Ocean County Library and utilizing a new free program.

The Library Equal Access Program (LEAP) was made possible through the library’s partnership with the New Jersey Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired (CBVI) and the New Jersey State Library Talking Book and Braille Center. Its purpose helps adults 55 years old and older with a change of vision to new helpful computer and iPad technology with magnification and speech.

Padone was among the first to take the training classes that were administered by instructor, Jennifer Crouch, assistive technology specialist for Advancing Opportunities. Advancing Opportunities is responsible for registering eligible residents for training, works with libraries to schedule training sessions and provides training to LEAP participants.

“I come out here each Wednesday to instruct those like Robert to become more acquainted with the apps on their iPhones and the visual enhancements available here,” Crouch said.

“Jennifer is terrific. If I knew how to use the iPad program two years ago when I started to have problems I would have been using it all that time. I can’t say enough about this program. I’ve learned how to do e-mails and post to Facebook. It has made my life that much better,” Padone said.

Padone was among those present during a brief ceremony held October 19 at the Toms River Branch which noted the importance of the multi-agency partnership.

“The LEAP program is a great equalizer. It connects people and helps them to be as independent as they can be,” said Elizabeth B. DeShields, Statewide Independent Living Coordinator for the NJ Dept. of Human Services Commission For The Blind and Visually Impaired.

“October is Blind Awareness Month and we want to thank the Ocean County Library and their staff here who know who can best use this equipment. This allows people to become readers again,” said Adam Szczepaniak, Deputy State Librarian, and Director of the NJ State Library Talking Book & Braille Center. He said the Ocean County Library is the sixth library system in the state to receive the visual enhancement equipment and services.

“The Ocean County Library is the best library system in the state. We didn’t have this technology five years ago but now you are providing a great service to those that need it,” Freeholder Joseph H. Vicari said. Vicari serves as liaison to the Ocean County Library and is chairman to the county’s Department of Senior Services. Vicari added how important this program was for a county that has approximately 200,000 seniors.

Ocean County Library Director Susan Quinn said that while each location of the Ocean County Library provides multiple services for those vision challenges, there are even more resources available at the Toms River Branch thanks to the LEAP program.

“This is a wonderful partnership and we could not do this without the support of our Ocean County Library Commission and the Board of Ocean County Freeholders and our dedicated staff,” Quinn said.

Padone said following the ceremony that, “we are put on this planet to learn and whatever I learn from this program I can help others with.”

To register for a class at the Ocean County Library call Assistive Technology Services at 888-322-1918, Ext. 595. For additional information contact Ashley Carvagno at 732-349-6200, Ext. 5114 or e-mail her at acarvagno@theoceancountylibrary.org

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Captions:

Advancing Opportunities Instructor Jennifer Crouch and her student, Bob Pedone, Toms River, speak about their experiences with the Library Equal Access Program (LEAP) during a dedication held at the Toms River branch of the Ocean County Library on October 19. The LEAP program utilizes technology available at the Toms River branch to allow blind and visually impaired adults to use a computer and access the Internet. The program also uses specialized equipment, such as enlarged keyboards, roller balls that function like a mouse, and large tablets.