

Library Incident Spurs Inquiry

By: Christen Caton

A tumultuous debate is going on in Williamstown this week, which was touched off by an incident in the parking lot of the Williamstown Public Library on the night of February 29, 2012. Local citizen Joe Standish was detained and threatened with arrest by a member of the local police force while sitting in his car outside the library after it had closed for the evening. Standish was reportedly using the library's wireless internet (Wi-Fi) access on his laptop to read various blogs when the officer, whose name has not been released by Williamstown Police, approached Standish and questioned him about why he was sitting in the parking lot.

In recent months, cars have often been found in the Williamstown Public Library parking lot

after hours, according to local residents. The traffic is by all accounts motivated by the freely available wi-fi access. Due to growing demand, the wait time to use one of the library's computer terminals during the hours of operation has often been in excess of 30 minutes, which has led to frustration. Many locals have chosen to bypass the library completely, leaving for coffee shops, internet cafes, and more distant libraries with shorter wait times. The public library does not turn off the Wi-Fi after closing, and it is not clear if one must have a library card to gain access at any time of day, so even those without a library card may have been able to make use of the signal. It has also not been determined at this

time how distantly access is available, though a local homeowner refused to comment when asked if she and her family had ever used the library's wireless access from their home.

On the 29th of February, the officer in question, after consulting with headquarters, threatened to charge Standish with unauthorized access, a law often applied in cases of hacking. In the end, Standish was not formally charged, but the incident has sparked discussion all over town. Some believe Standish was acting unethically, others that the library should restrict access to their system, and still others think the entire discussion is unnecessary, and that as long as there are no drug deals or instances of violence occurring in the library parking

lot, that everyone should be left alone to conduct business as they see fit.

Continue reading this edition of The Williamstown Times to learn more about this conflict.



Photo from:
http://www.thecarconnection.com/news/1037172_the-convenience-of-a-desk-right-on-your-steering-wheel

Local Man Threatened with Arrest

By: Sandra Findley

If you've noticed lately, ever since the Williamstown Public Library has made wi-fi available for its patrons, it's hard to find a parking spot. This has become the case even after the library closes its doors for the evening. The wi-fi can be accessed in the parking lot and beyond, and many citizens of Williamstown are taking advantage of this.

Joe Standish is one of the

citizens who have been enjoying using the library's wi-fi after hours; however, this past Thursday evening was not so enjoyable. It was an unusually quiet night in the library's parking lot, and Joe was the only one parked there. A police officer who was patrolling the area noticed the sole vehicle and thought it seemed suspicious, so he investigated further. The officer could not find a specific law that Joe was violating, so he threatened him to arrest him

for unauthorized access.

Undeniably, Joe was outraged at this threat. "I've been coming here for weeks, just like a lot of other people do, after the library is closed to use the wi-fi. I was just reading blogs and not causing any harm."

Joe moved his family here a couple of years ago to take a job at the plant, but it recently closed down so he's been using the library's wi-fi to search for jobs and to read a networking blog. He's been coming to the library parking lot after it closes

because that's the only time that suits his schedule. "My wife works at the church as a secretary during the day so I have to stay home with the kids. The only time I can go to the library for wi-fi is after the kids go to bed."

Joe firmly believes that he has the right to sit in the parking lot after hours and use the library's wi-fi. "They don't have any signs saying that I can't park here after they're closed. Also, I pay my taxes so I have every right to use the wi-fi."



Photo taken by Becky Adams

“I believe it is important that we take efforts to prevent any form of censorship.”

Library Services for All

By: Dawn Edelen

As an employee of the Williamstown library for about five years, I felt it was necessary to speak up and to write in to the paper to voice my opinion about the recent events concerning after-hours use of library services. It is the goal of our library, and certainly most libraries around the country, to provide the best and most efficient services to our patrons. We want to make sure that we can accommodate as many people as we can, and that is the reason that anyone can access our wireless internet inside or outside the building. We do not turn it off at night, and we do not have signs that restrict parking access to our property during any hours of the day or night. Even though the library has only certain hours of operation, we realize that not everyone can utilize our services during those hours. It is important to us that everyone have access to the information and services that they need.

Our homes and privacy are things that we value greatly. All of us. Safety is also an incredible concern for everyone, including all of the library employees. We have no reason to believe that the man in question was threatening anyone's safety, despite his late hours in the library parking lot. We are grateful for a diligent police force that watches out for everyone in our town, but that does not change the fact that no one committed a crime. No one did anything wrong.

I believe it is important that we take efforts to prevent any form of censorship. Time of day should not restrict anyone's access to information, personal opinion should not restrict access. Even if the person in question used the access for information that some others might view as inappropriate, the fact is that no one was

harmed and no one was denied library services except for person in question themselves. They are the true victim of this act.

I hope that in light of these events, everyone will be a little more open-minded in the future. It is easy to judge what happened as an outsider, or to think that someone else was in the wrong, but we should all remember how valuable information is and how any one of us might need that access at any given time. If we deny people opportunities now or abuse laws about technology set in place for different reasons, there will only be more restrictions and rules in the future. As long as every patron has a safe environment to study and to search, then that is our main concern. Otherwise, library services and information should remain free and open to all.



Photo from:
<http://cityofevanston.org/planning-zoning/neighborhood-planning/>

Keep Our Neighborhood Safe

By: Sandra Findley

Ever since the Williamstown Library has made wi-fi available, a lot of people have been gathering in the parking lot at night and on the weekends, sitting in their cars, and looking at questionable material on their laptops. As the president of the neighborhood watch, and as a mother, I find this totally unsafe and unacceptable. I am troubled by what inappropriate websites

people may be exploring. Also, this new presence of people at night has also caused crime and vandalism to rise. Just last week, Linda's Tea Room and Antique Shop, located around the corner from the library, was burglarized.

As a concerned citizen, I believe that the library needs to address this matter and set a policy. I believe that it is in the

best interest of the citizens of Williamstown for the library to turn off their wi-fi after hours and to post signs to discourage loitering in its parking lot after they are closed. A town meeting needs to be called immediately so all of us can voice our concerns. We care about our small town and want it to remain a safe place to live.

24/7 Wi-Fi a Plus for Community

By: Becky Adams

If you didn't know, the Williamstown Library offers internet access available to patrons 24-7. What this means is not only can you or I walk in to the library with a laptop and have internet during regular hours, but we can also access the internet from their parking lot after hours.

"We don't turn it off when the library is closed," commented Elmer Johnson, President of the Library Board of Directors. Johnson stated one of the reasons for this was due to the cutback in the library's hours of operation due to new budgetary constraints. "With the economy as it is we didn't want to lay off any of our employees so we cutback the hours the doors are open and we leave the internet on" said Johnson.

Johnson also cited with the recent plant closing there are members of our community who have had to cancel some of their personal amenities at

home and this is a service their tax dollars have paid to have. I personally am aware of many individuals who are very appreciative for this service. If you drive by the library after it's closed during the week you may see several cars in the parking lot, but stop by on a Sunday afternoon and it's a different story. Asked if he was aware of the goings-on on Sunday in the parking lot Johnson commented, "There's a study group from the high school that meets – weather permitting." Some might consider the gathering a nuisance but Johnson has discussed the issue with the library director and other Board members and there's a consensus amongst them that for the time being, since there is currently no official policy regarding after-hours internet access, they will keep their eye on the current situation and create a policy if circumstances change.

"We've been in contact with the study group and have encouraged them, in a matter of speaking, to keep their focus on why they're meeting and not turn it into something else," remarked Johnson. Johnson expressed that these are the same feelings he holds towards anyone using this service. "There's a trust between both parties," says Johnson, "but, we also have Betty." He speaks of non-other than Betty Jay, retired librarian extraordinaire who happens to live across the street from the library. "I wouldn't say she's spying for us but if behavior crosses the line she'll let us know." The fact is, Betty and the study group have somewhat adopted each other. "She's like a giant pool of information" says student Tommy Powell.

"We have benefited so much from her help—and her homemade cookies are THE best" (see Betty's Scrumptious Snickerdoodles on pg.2 of the Lifestyle Section). Betty has enjoyed the opportunity to help the students and sees it as a way to continue broadening the minds of our youth. "We do our best to follow the values set forth by the American Library Association" said Johnson. "And one of those is to do our best to serve humanity. "Isn't that really what libraries are meant to do? Their goal is to create community through the exchange of information 24/7.



Voice of a Taxpayer

By: Dawn Edelen

After recent events at our local library, I felt as though I needed to submit a voice of reason. I believe that the authorities made the right move in attempting to clear out the parking lot after library hours. While I understand the purpose of a library is to provide services without discrimination, there has to be some kind of limit. I am a member of this community, and the taxes I pay go to our local library. I feel as though I should be able to know that the library is a safe place and that no one is around to possibly tamper with the building or the services.

The taxes I pay also go to local parks and schools, and there are restrictions and rules that go along with all of those services. Parks frequently have hours that people are allowed to visit, and they open/close at certain hours (typically around sunrise/sunset) for the safety of everyone. Regardless of anyone's purposes in a park, there are rules. The same should apply for a library, despite anyone's intent when using their services, malicious or friendly. Within certain hours of the day, the use of goods and services can be monitored, and that's how it should be.

There was also no indication that the person in question was even a part of this community. I realize that libraries do not restrict the use of their books and services based on where someone lives, but I do not think that it is good to attract possibly unsavory people here at all hours of the day simply because free and reliable internet service is offered. In order to keep our community safe as well as to keep our library free of trouble, it would be best for the library to restrict access to the wireless internet. There should be limited hours, so that people don't linger on library property, and possibly even a way to log in via library card or email address so that the library can have some way to track who uses the service. That way if anything illegal does happen, there is a way to track and monitor what is going on.

We all have a right to privacy, but when it comes to public services, sometimes we give up certain privacies for the greater good of all. It is a good thing that the library is trying to give the best service to everyone, but there still needs to be regulation.

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Letters to the Editor: Controls are Necessary

By: Ioldcurmudgeon (Christen Caton)

The recent discussion of whether or not the library should allow access to their Wi-Fi when the library is closed brings to mind a concern I have about the library's free-information-for-all attitude. The library has made clear that they want to try to maintain the highest level of service despite the current economic climate; I am concerned that the library, in their effort to promote access may have left themselves as an institution open to legal action, which could be disastrous to providing any kind of service in the future.

What does the library's insurance policy say about injuries that occur on the premises, including those that occur when the library is closed? Is the library liable? What if something were to happen to one of those cheeky brats who hang out in front of the library on Sundays? I've seen the tricks they do on their skateboards and bicycles, and I'm shocked that nobody has yet broken a leg on the cracks in the cement. What if someone is injured in the parking lot at night due to ice/snow buildup that the library has not yet cleared? If someone falls and breaks their wrist while going to chat with a neighbor in the next car over, is the

library's insurance on the hook? It would seem that there is a chance for that situation, based on my discussion with my nephew, the lawyer. According to him, if people are invited onto the premises, the occupier or owner has a "legal duty to take reasonable steps to correct known deficiencies and to prevent conditions which could lead to injury" (J. Caton, personal communication, February 15, 2012).

In addition to liability for physical injuries, I worry that the library's policies leave them open to suit for activities that occur online using their internet access. As we all know, the proposed SOPA, PIPA, and ACTA legislation have been aimed at cutting off copyright infringement at the source, but it's a section of the DMCA, the Digital Millennium Copyright Act, that concerns me here. According to the DMCA, "organizations that circumvent access controls or assist someone to circumvent these controls by providing tools or guidance are liable" (Buchanan and Henderson, 2009, p. 73). If someone is using the library's Wi-Fi to illegally share music files or to stream video, unless the library assists with discovering who used their access to perform the violations of copyright in question, they could be at risk of exposure to a

secondary suit (Buchanan and Henderson, 2009, p.73).

Rather than expanding access to the Wi-Fi, I think it should be restricted to times that the library is open, and only usable within the scope of the building. Additionally, I think the library should plainly state on the Wi-Fi access page that actions in violation of copyright are against library policy and undertaken at the sole risk of the user. Hopefully, this will shield the library from risk and maintain the use of library services for all.

Buchanan, E., & Henderson, K. (2009). *Case studies in library and information science ethics*. Jefferson, NC: McFarland.



Photo from:
<http://www.californiaimmigrationlawyerblog.com/naturalization/>