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Glen Carbon Centennial Library (GCCL), IL. has more going for it than its’ new beautifully constructed building. It was chosen this year as the “Best Small Library (serving 25,000 people) in America,” winning $15,000 from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. How did they do it? What makes them so special? Can we as school media specialists learn anything from them?

Smiling, happy, friendly librarians meet their customers as soon as they enter, possibly even calling them by name. That response to every patron is deliberate and considered professional. The library partnered up with the Chamber of Commerce and brought to town “Disney's Keys to Excellence” for a staff development program. Their motto became, “More Than You Expect.” From the director to the newest part-time assistant, this attitude permeates GCCL and is the basis that makes it a community serving, model, small library. Surprisingly, they also consider the most important people on their campus to be their own staff and so treat each other as they would a guest. Director Anne Hughes makes it a priority to hire people with personality and who are willing to provide great customer service, stating “After all, if people don’t come here, we don’t have a job.

Some of GCCL’s keys to success:

* Open to change – A continual “Suggestion Blog” is available on their website and an in-house wiki “No to Yes Log” is kept every time a ‘no’ is said to a patron. At regular meetings, the ‘team’ goes over the log and tries to find a better solution.
* Relevance - With the help of a grant (08 – 09) which provided additional technology. 450 tech classes have been offered to the public encompassing everything from email to computer programming to social networking.
* Digital Reference – Hardcopies of reference books were exchanged for digital. Programs to help clients learn to access the virtual references were put in place in the library and uploaded to youtube.
* Teens – Movies and gaming were introduced making a social gathering place for teens that otherwise had no comparable place to congregate.
* Schools – GCCL reaches out to expand its relationship with school districts by creating collections that support the curriculum. It partners with them in the summer reading programs and hosts field trips.
* Variety – Called ‘Library to Go,’ MP3 players provide downloadable books.

This library has made itself relevant with technology, warm and inviting in its customer care, bright and clean in its environment making everyone want to spend time there. Hopefully, as school librarians, we can approximate a welcoming atmosphere, a smiling face, knowledge and direction, to the students who regularly visit with us.

Question: GCCL makes it fun, especially for teens, to gather there. Can we as SLMS utilize that quality more?