



Valley News — Medora Hebert

Neil Deshpande carefully looks over the selection in the children's section of the Etna library.

Little Library, Big Heart

Pride Of Etna Doesn't Compete With Its Neighbors

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ETNA — What the Etna Library lacks in size, it makes up for with atmosphere and service.

That is what the librarian and the trustees of the town's official library believe, and what they rely on. Because strictly in terms of size, Etna's one-room book repository is dwarfed by two other libraries in town: Howe Library and Baker Library at Dartmouth College.

Open only 16 hours each week, the Etna Library — which has occupied the same building on Two Mile Road for more than 90 years — has carved its own niche.

"We primarily serve parents and their children," librarian Patti Hardenberg said in a recent interview. Visitors to the library through November of this year included 1,000 children and 900 adults.

Trustees Rebecca Torrey and Elizabeth Storrs praised Hardenberg for implementing children's and toddlers' storytimes. Hardenberg likes to introduce the children to literature, and she helps them make crafts and sing songs.

The toddlers' storytime is "pitched at exactly the right level," said Torrey, whose daughter participated in the program. It is a special, cozy atmosphere where the children get their first chance to listen in a group, she said.

A town policy directs the Etna Library to serve the residents of Etna and Hanover Center and to welcome patrons from all over town. Storrs said Etna has retained "a sense of a village," and that the library is part of this.

Hardenberg said visitors are taken with the charm of the library. The building has a solid granite foundation, and the steps and portico are cut granite. Inside, patrons admire the varnished hazel ceiling, pendulum clock and stuffed red-shouldered hawk poised as if to take flight.

For the younger crowd, a heap of furry puppets sits on the ledge beneath the inoperative clock.

The library has more children's books than adult ones. It tries to balance its collection with the needs of the community, Storrs said.

Hardenberg said the library tries to complement rather than compete with the collections at Howe, Baker and the schools. For instance, when considering which children's books to buy, Hardenberg looks for books kids can have fun with, rather than books they might need to write reports. Research volumes can be found at the town's other libraries, so Hardenberg doesn't need to duplicate them.

"My focus is more on recreational reading," she said.

There is also a serious shortage of space at Etna. The walls of the 25-by-33-foot building are lined with original wood shelves bearing about 5,000 volumes. A large, rectangular wooden table and chairs sit in the middle, with a small, painted table and chairs to the side for children.

Add a librarian's desk, a computer table, stands for magazines and books on tape and some file cabinets, and not much room is left. There is a basement used for storage; the vault was made into a bathroom several years ago.

Hardenberg said the library goes for quality instead of quantity. The town allotted \$17,500 to run the facility in the current fiscal year; this included \$12,000 to pay the part-time librarian and a cleaning person and \$3,250 for books and subscriptions.

This year, the library is asking for money to buy access to the ValleyNet computer network. It is already linked to "KnowHowe," the computerized version of Howe's card catalog. Etna's collection should be available on the system within a year, Hardenberg said.

The library is open Monday from 3:30 p.m. to 8 p.m., Wednesday from 1:30 p.m. to 6 p.m., and Thursday from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. and 7 p.m. to 9 p.m.