



# **Making a Difference in People's Lives**

A Strategic Plan For the Somerset County Library System

# **MAKING A DIFFERENCE IN PEOPLE'S LIVES**

## **A Strategic Plan for the Somerset County Library System 2007 - 2009**

February 2007



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# Statement from the Library Commission

Making it Happen: A Strategic Plan for  
Somerset County Library  
System 2007-2009

This plan for action, *Making a Difference in People's Lives: a Strategic Plan for the Somerset County Library System*, is a formal guide to our vision of this library system and our commitment to the member communities that we serve. The Library Commission and staff believe that the Somerset County Library System is a strong system. We recognize the rapidly changing face of technology and its impact on library services. We attempt to balance new formats and technologies with traditional library services. We are enthusiastic, flexible, and committed to continuous improvement. This strategic plan will help us meet the challenge of leading our library system in its central role of improving and enriching the quality of our residents' lives.

Evelyn Silverstein, Chairperson  
Somerset County Library Commission

## COMMISSION MEMBERS

Evelyn Silverstein, *Chairperson*  
Mary R. Caruso, *Vice-Chairperson*  
Susan F. Bateman  
Walter Blejwas

Art Carlson  
Elaine Keramidis  
Jane K. Williams

## PLANNING COMMITTEE MEMBERS *2004-2006 Plan*

Karen Bilton, Bridgewater Library  
Patricia Butcher, Community Representative  
Art Carlson, Community Representative  
Mary Caruso, Library Commission  
Janet Castelpietra, Peapack-Gladstone Library  
Mallika Chaganty, Community Representative  
Khana Chakraborty, Bridgewater Library  
Mun Hwa Chen, Bridgewater Library  
Sarah Cornish, Warren Library  
Sue Coslick, Bridgewater Library  
Andrew D'Apice, Warren Library

Cathy Delneo, Bridgewater Library  
Sharon Grossman, Community Representative  
Kathleen Harris, Administration  
Jim Hecht, Administration  
Debbie Levin, Bridgewater Library  
Gail Madak, Mary Jacobs Library  
Laura Mellor, Hillsborough Library  
Doug Poswencyk, Watchung Library  
Dick Stevens, North Plainfield Library  
Beth Willoughby, Mary Jacobs Library  
Helen Yakalis, Bridgewater Library

## REVISION COMMITTEE MEMBERS *2007- 2009 Plan*

Kathleen Harris, Administration  
Edward Hoag, Hillsborough Library  
Hannah Kerwin, Bound Brook Library  
Mei Mei Morris, Mary Jacobs Library

Library services continue to change at a rapid pace in response to customer expectations, a renewed interest in reading and viewing, and technological advances related to storing and retrieving information. Traditional indicators of library use, such as the number of items borrowed, the number of reference questions answered, and the number of library visits, demonstrate that libraries in the Somerset County Library System are busier than ever.<sup>1</sup>

Programs and services have been developed in response to the needs of residents in the communities that the library system serves. Residents have welcomed innovations such as wireless Internet networks within our buildings, online interactive reference services, remote access to electronic resources and online access to their personal accounts. The Somerset County Library System is a key player in improving the quality of life for those who live or work in Somerset County.

The Library Commission and staff are committed to planning and improving library service. This plan is the fifth in a series of strategic plans that have helped shape the direction of the Somerset County Library System and have guided its growth during the last 18 years. Past plans have dealt with issues ranging from creating an infrastructure for the delivery of library services (funding, staffing, and buildings) to the introduction of technology and new electronic services. This 2007-2009 plan builds upon the existing strengths of the system, while looking ahead to serving the next generation of library users.

The Somerset County Library Commission, administration and staff recognize their responsibility to plan for the development, operation and growth of the county library system. The cost of new programs and services and the impact on residents of any budget increases are always carefully evaluated. This plan identifies priorities and broad-based goals to be considered by all who are involved in making decisions about library service in Somerset County – County Freeholders and administrators, local government officials, local library advisory boards, local branch administrators and staff. By developing action steps and implementing plans that address the priorities and goals outlined in this document, the Somerset County Library system will continue to advance and grow.

<sup>1</sup> According to New Jersey State Library Annual Statistical Report

# How this Plan was Developed

Staff, Library Commission and community members met in a series of planning sessions to develop the library's 2004-2006 strategic plan. They were assisted by Leslie and Alan Burger, consultants from Library Development Solutions.

In the fall of 2006 the library's Management Team discussed a process for updating the 2004-2006 strategic plan. The Management Team decided that the priorities and goals set forth in that plan were still relevant. They felt that the plan continued to address effectively the needs of member communities' and that this plan still gave staff an appropriate framework for developing programs and services. A subcommittee of the Management Team was authorized to evaluate and revise the plan so that it could be used for the next three years. The Management Team reviewed and accepted the revisions of the subcommittee.

The Library Commission supported the Management Team's decision to update the 2004-2006 plan for use in 2007-2009. This document is the result of that work and has been approved by the Library Commission.

# What We Have Achieved

This strategic plan is the fifth successive plan adopted by the Somerset County Library System. Each new planning cycle has allowed the library to review its direction and renew its commitment to its guiding principles of providing high quality services and facilities that respond to the needs of county residents.

The library system's achievements since the last plan include:

## *System Expansion*

- Growth of the system to include the communities of Bound Brook and South Bound Brook

## *Facilities improvements:*

- Completion of renovations and expansions of the Hillsborough, Warren and Mary Jacobs Libraries
- Beginning of renovations of the Bound Brook Library
- Cooperative planning with community leaders for new library buildings in Peapack-Gladstone and Watchung
- Planning and oversight of other facility improvements



Mary Jacobs Library



Hillsborough Library



Warren Library



Bound Brook Library

*Expanded library services:*

- Self-checkout option at the Bridgewater Library
- More branch-to-branch deliveries of library materials
- Introduction of Sunday hours at the Hillsborough library

*Technological Enhancements:*

- Redesign of the library's website
- Participation in QandANJ.org, a real-time online reference service
- Introduction of wireless Internet networks in all library buildings
- Availability of e-books and e-audio selections through the library's website
- Digitization of New Jersey archival materials

*Programming and collection development:*

- Enhanced program opportunities for adults
- More computer classes and classes on the use of the library's electronic resources
- Continued support of adult, young adult and children's book discussion groups and reading clubs
- Expansion of new world language collections (Hindi, Gujarati, Chinese, Russian and Spanish) in response to changing community demographics



# What Our Communities Need and Expect

The Somerset County Library System's strategic planning process is intended to reflect the needs and expectations of the communities our libraries serve. We strive to provide highly trained staff in sufficient numbers to support the level of service expected by the communities. We recognize the diverse populations within our communities and seek to identify and respond to their needs.

Identified needs include:

- Responding to greater demands for computers, technology services and specialized data bases, as well as instruction in their use
- Addressing the existence of a "digital divide" in which access and use of electronic information varies greatly within the county
- Accommodating residents who speak or read languages such as Spanish, Russian, Chinese, Gujarati and Hindi
- Increasing the accessibility of programs, collections and services for residents with special needs.
- Providing specialized services and facilities geared towards a large segment of the population that is growing older
- Meeting ongoing expectations for services that will meet the developmental needs of children from infancy through the teen years
- Addressing ongoing expectations that the library's facilities are convenient, welcoming, comfortable, easy to use and able to accommodate a variety of activities at the same time.



# SCLS Vision, Mission and Values

The library system's existing vision, mission and values statements as outlined in the 2004 – 2006 plan continue to reflect current views of the library's role and guiding principles.

## Vision

Our vision is to provide a dynamic system of vital, inviting libraries that are an integral part of the everyday lives of people who live or work in Somerset County.

As the Somerset County Library System works to achieve this vision, library users will experience the following:

- A wide array of library services and programs that appeal to the interests of all age groups.
- A strong collection of books, magazines and non-print materials and access to up-to-date print and digital information.
- Highly skilled, responsive staff that focus on the needs of library users.
- Easy to use library branches in convenient locations throughout Somerset County.
- Libraries that reflect the diversity and culture of the communities they serve.
- Centers for community information and culture.



## Mission

We believe that the Somerset County Library System can make a difference in people's lives. Our mission is to provide library services and resources that help people in Somerset County expand their knowledge and talents, make informed decisions, enrich their leisure hours, and enhance their daily lives.

## Shared Values

- We treat library users and each other with respect, courtesy and understanding.
- We understand that all user requests are valid and important.
- We strive to provide verifiable information at all times from current, up-to-date resources that meet user needs.
- We offer library materials and access to information that reflect diverse points of view.
- We offer access to library materials, services, and facilities for all ages.
- We respect the confidentiality of library transactions and requests.
- We maintain a supportive work environment where everyone's dignity is respected and staff input counts.
- We invest in staff development and training to improve the quality of service.
- We are open to new ideas and welcome community input.
- We work together, accomplish goals and enjoy what we do.



The Somerset County Library System serves a multitude of users with a variety of demands for services and resources. While library staff do their best on a daily basis to meet user needs, it is essential for the library to determine its most important priorities for service and resource allocation, both now and for the future. These priorities and goals, which were derived from library staff and user input, are intended to guide the Somerset County Library System's development. This plan will assist the Somerset County Library System Commission, administration and staff as they develop library budgets and services, determine the allocation of county, state and federal resources, and improve the library's responsiveness to users' needs.

## **Priorities and Goals in Detail**

### ***Priority: Customer service***

Customer service may be the determining factor when individuals choose their information source. SCLS is committed to providing consistently high quality customer service to ensure that library users will have positive library experiences.

**Goal:** Provide customer service that is personalized, responsive, efficient, courteous and empathetic

- Provide staff training in the standards and principles of excellence in customer service.
- Review policies and procedures to be sure they are as customer-focused as possible.
- Conduct routine surveys of customers to assess their level of satisfaction with library services

### ***Priority: Meeting Popular Interests***

People of all ages continue to use libraries to find materials that reflect today's popular interests. Users expect the library to have an ample supply of the latest bestsellers, to offer advice on reading selections and to purchase materials in a variety of formats. They want to locate these materials easily within buildings that provide an atmosphere that is conducive to reading and listening. They expect friendly, personalized service available during all of the library's open hours, and they want libraries to adopt the best practices of some of their bookstore competitors such as lengthening hours of operation and adding cafes.

**Goal:** Anticipate and respond to public demand for current and varied library collections and services

- Purchase multiple copies of popular library materials to meet community demands in a timely manner.
- Expand the availability of popular library materials in a variety of formats
- Provide knowledgeable reader's advisory services to all patrons
- Present programs on topics of interest to patrons of all ages
- Partner with local municipalities and the Mary Jacobs Foundation to assure that our facilities are safe, clean, welcoming and suited to the effective provision of library services.

### ***Priority: Serving the Interest of Youth***

Offering young people a variety of materials and library services is one way to encourage lifelong learning. The library can be successful in reaching this age group by providing a large assortment of materials of interest to children and their caregivers, offering programs at convenient times, and providing children and young adults access to all of the library's materials and services. The Somerset County Library System would like to be seen as a family destination and valued as a partner in the educational process. Staff will develop partnerships with people who work with youth on a regular basis – teachers, childcare providers and youth services agencies – and create an environment that supports these services.

**Goal:** Continue to offer services to children and young adults within and beyond the walls of the library.

- Enhance youth services programs and collections to meet changing community needs.
- Assist parents in providing a strong reading and educational foundation for their children.
- Provide youth with materials to develop the skills they need to be successful students.
- Develop community partnerships with area schools and other organizations serving youth.
- Promote and publicize library activities available to youth.

### ***Priority: Meeting the Needs of Changing Populations***

As Somerset County demographics change, the library staff will continue to evaluate our programs, services and materials to ensure that the library meets the needs of the diverse groups within our communities.

**Goal:** Continue to provide and adapt library services that acknowledge and respond to the changing demographics of the communities served by our branches.

- Work on system wide and branch level responses to identified community needs.
- Develop collections, programs and services in each branch that respond to the diversity within our communities.



### ***Priority: Educating the Public About Libraries***

The need for marketing and public relations of library services continues to be important, especially as competition from the private sector challenges traditional library practices. Somerset County Library System libraries strive to be visible in their communities.

**Goal:** Increase public awareness about what SCLS libraries have to offer.

- Participate in community events to promote awareness of the library system.
- Develop media campaigns that draw attention to the library system, using various formats and media to communicate the message to the broadest possible audience.
- Use marketing techniques and displays throughout the library system to highlight collections and services.

### ***Priority: Establishing Community Connections***

Libraries cannot exist in isolation from their communities. Residents expect their libraries to be a vital center of community life and many people seek interaction and social contact at the library. By partnering with outside groups and organizations, and providing essential resources and services, the library can strengthen both itself and the community. The library can help connect people with others in the community by providing space to encourage public discourse, sponsoring meetings to address community issues, or providing space that encourages conversation.

**Goal:** Establish mutually beneficial community connections with businesses, non-profit organizations and community groups

- Develop relationships with community groups to promote library services and work together on community projects.
- Where possible provide meeting spaces to meet the needs of community groups and partnership programs.



## ***Priority: Ensuring Access to Information and Learning***

Successful libraries provide services that make it as easy as possible for community members to use their library. The Somerset County Library System is a primary information resource for county residents. SCLS staff will guide and instruct library users to be knowledgeable information consumers. Staff will connect patrons to accurate, timely, and useful information using a wide array of resources. Staff will work more efficiently, eliminate redundant tasks and provide more direct customer-focused services.

**Goal:** Provide information services to better meet the changing needs of library users in a digital environment

- Anticipate community information needs and develop services and programs to meet those needs.
- Incorporate new, efficient and user-friendly methods for delivering library services
- Teach people to use the materials, services and technologies provided by the library.

## ***Priority: Providing Continuing Education and Staff Development***

Changing library practices require continued enhancement of library staff skills. The Somerset County Library System recognizes that the staff is our most important resource and that a well-trained staff ensures that our customers will have a positive library experience. The investment in staff training is funding well spent to ensure high-quality library service.

**Goal:** Provide opportunities for staff to develop, refine and increase their skills in order to improve library service.

- Determine the type and level of skills needed to meet public demand as part of an annual assessment.
- Provide training to meet identified needs, especially with regard to customer service, diverse populations and technology.



# Implementing the Plan and Measuring Success

This plan provides an overall framework to guide the Somerset County Library System. Many of the recommendations in the plan will be implemented on a system-wide basis. However, another critical aspect of implementing the plan rests with individual branches as they develop annual plans to address the specific needs of the communities they serve. Staff at all branches will review the plan each year and develop specific recommendations for achieving goals as part of the annual budget process.

During the course of this strategic plan, the Somerset County Library System will develop consistent measurements and indicators to determine the success of the library in responding to and meeting community needs. Library staff and Commissioners will set aside time annually to assess their progress in meeting the goals and objectives outlined in this document. When appropriate, goals and objectives will be modified depending on changing needs and circumstances that may occur during the planning cycle. The results of this annual assessment effort will be shared widely with Library Advisory Boards and the community.



## Special Thanks...

...to the following Somerset County Library System Staff for providing the many photographs in this publication:

Christine Adamcio .....	Bridgewater Library
Laura Franz .....	Peapack-Gladstone Library
Leisa Hudson Hamill .....	Watchung Library
Meredith Hoyer .....	North Plainfield Library
Hannah Kerwin .....	Bound Brook Library
Gail Madak.....	Mary Jacobs Library
Manuela Miracle .....	Bridgewater Library
Larry Sapienza.....	Warren Library
Chris Taylor.....	Hillsborough Library

## Branch Listing

The libraries of the Somerset County Library System are open to anyone for in-house use. A free library card may be obtained by anyone who lives, works, or goes to school in a member municipality. Also eligible are Raritan Valley Community College students, Somerset County Government employees; literacy volunteers and students using an SCLS facility, anyone who is a volunteer fire person, auxiliary police, rescue squad or emergency medical service member performing this service in a member municipality, and residents who have a verifiable mental or physical disability.

**Member Municipalities:** Bound Brook, Branchburg, Bridgewater, Green Brook, Hillsborough, Millstone, Montgomery, North Plainfield, Peapack–Gladstone, Rocky Hill, South Bound Brook, Warren, and Watchung.

### **Bridgewater Library**

#### **Somerset County Library Headquarters**

1 Vogt Dr.  
PO Box 6700  
Bridgewater, NJ 08807  
(908) 526-4016

**Director:** James M. Hecht, ext. 129

#### **Assistant Director:**

Kathleen Jones Harris, ext. 128

**Hours:** Mon.-Thu. 9:00 a.m. - 9:00 p.m.  
Fri.-Sat. 9:00 a.m. - 5:00 p.m.  
\*Sun. 12:00 p.m. - 5:00 p.m.  
\*\*Sun. CLOSED

### **Bound Brook Library**

402 East High Street  
Bound Brook, NJ 08805  
(732) 356-0043

**Branch Director:** Hannah Kerwin

**Hours:** Mon.-Thu. 9:30 a.m. - 9:00 p.m.  
Fri.-Sat. 9:30 a.m. - 5:00 p.m.  
\*\*Sat. 9:30 a.m. - 12:30 p.m.

### **Hillsborough Library**

Hillsborough Municipal Complex  
379 South Branch Rd.  
Hillsborough, NJ 08844  
(908) 369-2200

**Branch Director:** Edward Hoag

**Hours:** Mon.-Thu. 9:30 a.m. - 9:00 p.m.  
Fri.-Sat. 9:30 a.m. - 5:00 p.m.  
\*Sun. 12:00 p.m. - 5:00 p.m.  
\*\*Sat. 9:30 a.m. - 2:00 p.m.  
\*\*Sun. CLOSED

### **Mary Jacobs Memorial Library**

64 Washington St.  
Rocky Hill, NJ 08553  
(609) 924-7073

**Branch Director:** Helen Morris

**Hours:** Mon.-Thu. 9:30 a.m. - 8:30 p.m.  
Fri. 9:30 a.m. - 5:30 p.m.  
Sat. 9:30 a.m. - 4:30 p.m.  
\*\*Sat. 9:30 a.m. - 12:30 p.m.

### **North Plainfield Library**

6 Rockview Ave.  
North Plainfield, NJ 07060  
(908) 755-7909

**Branch Director:** Richard Stevens

**Hours:** Mon.-Thu. 9:30 a.m. - 9:00 p.m.  
Fri.-Sat. 9:30 a.m. - 5:00 p.m.  
\*\*Sat. 9:30 a.m. - 12:30 p.m.

### **Peapack/Gladstone Library**

Peapack-Gladstone Municipal Complex,  
School St.  
Peapack, NJ 07977  
(908) 234-0598

**Branch Director:** Karen Pifher

**Hours:** Mon. & Fri. 10:00 a.m. - 5:00 p.m.  
Tue. Wed. & Thu. 10:00 a.m. - 9:00 p.m.  
Sat. 10:00 a.m. - 4:00 p.m.  
\*\*Sat. CLOSED

\* Effective from Sept to June  
\*\* Effective only in July & August

### **Warren Township Library**

42 Mountain Blvd.  
Warren, NJ 07059  
(908) 754-5554

**Branch Director:** Elaine Whiting

**Hours:** Mon.-Thu. 9:30 a.m. - 9:00 p.m.  
Fri. 9:30 a.m. - 5:00 p.m.  
Sat. 9:30 a.m. - 4:00 p.m.  
\*\*Sat. 9:30 a.m. - 12:30 p.m.

### **Watchung Library**

12 Stirling Rd.  
Watchung, NJ 07060  
(908) 561-0117

**Branch Director:** Doug Poswencyk

**Hours:** Mon.-Thu. 10:00 a.m. - 9:00 p.m.  
Fri. 9:30 a.m. - 4:30 p.m.  
Sat. 10:00 a.m. - 4:00 p.m.  
\*\*Sat. 9:30 a.m. - 12:30 p.m.

### **Branchburg Library**

The Station House, Olive St.  
Neshanic Station, NJ 08853  
(908) 369-5355

**Hours:** Mon. & Thu. 6:30 p.m. - 8:00 p.m.  
Wed. 1:30 p.m. - 5:00 p.m.  
Sat. 10:00 a.m. - 12:00 p.m.

### **Washington Valley Library**

Washington Valley Rd.,  
Martinsville, NJ 08836  
(732) 356-2363

**Hours:** Mon. & Wed. 2:00 p.m. - 4:00 p.m.  
& 7:00 p.m. - 9:00 p.m.  
Tue. Thu. & Fri. 2:00 p.m. - 4:00 p.m.  
Sat. 10:00 a.m. - 12:00 p.m.





