

Article published on February 22, 2009

Concord Monitor **Board of Contributors**

This place is a goldmine!

Last year, I offset my entire city tax bill by using the public library

By MIKE ALBERICI For the Monitor

February 22, 2009

The Concord Public Library is an amazing deal: Use the library and you save money. Don't use it and you throw away the taxes you paid. The economy stinks right now, and the library is a great way to help you stretch your finances. You've paid for it, you might as well put it to use. In fact, you can easily offset your entire local tax bill with borrowed media from the library. Yes, that's right. Your entire local tax bill.

I am a Concord Public Library power user. I visit the library twice a week and know most of the librarians on a first-name basis. I'm familiar with the wide range of services that the library offers, and I know how to get the most bang for my local tax buck. The city portion of my tax bill last year was \$1,476. Of course, more than just library services come out of that \$1,476 - fire, police, trash pickup, snowplowing and more - but for the sake of arguing, let's pretend that the library alone charged me \$1,476 for a library card. Would it be worth it to purchase a library card at this rate? Yes - and here's why:

In the Concord Public Library entryway are books-for-sale shelves. These are old books that the library is getting rid of and books that people have donated. If you collect books, or just need to fill the spaces on that monster shelf that you built in the living room, here is a great place to get books cheaply. Most books are a buck or two. If you're patient, and check often

enough, you can often find a rare treasure. Last year I bought a rare first edition of Peter Benchley's *Jaws*. An online rare bookshop in Manhattan has a similar copy for \$375. It cost me \$1. For another dollar I bought a mint copy of *Contact*, a novel by astronomer Carl Sagan. When I got home I checked the copyright page to see if it was a first edition. It was, and there on the title page was the signature of Carl Sagan too. Buy it on eBay for \$350.

The magazine section is an easy place to save some money. You can't take out the current month's issue, but who cares if you're a month late? Last year I read every issue of *Macworld*, *Fine Woodworking*, *WoodenBoat*, *Esquire*, *Astronomy*, *Family Handyman* and *Workbench*. To subscribe to those seven magazines directly would have cost me \$183.89.

Another great way to save money, especially if you have a family, is with the library's museum pass program. The front desk lets you sign out free passes to many local museums, including the Aviation History Museum of New Hampshire, The Christa McAuliffe Planetarium, The Currier Museum of Art, The Fells and the Museum of New Hampshire History. Last year I took my family on a day visit to Canterbury Shaker Village with a free library pass that saved me two adult admissions, a savings of \$30. For our anniversary my wife and I spent a long weekend in Boston and brought along two free library passes to the Museum of Fine Arts, a savings of \$34. What would the library be without books? And lots of them. Libraries lend books to people, but they also lend books to other libraries too.

I'm working on a graduate degree at Boston University. If you've taken a college course recently, you know that college textbooks have become criminally expensive. If you're looking for an expensive textbook, the librarians at the reference desk can help you in a search through an extensive roster of cooperating libraries that share with the Concord Public Library.

Most of New Hampshire's huge collegiate libraries are on this list, and chances are good that you'll find the book that you're looking for. Last year I borrowed four textbooks through the interlibrary loan service. Of course, you can't highlight or write notes in the margins of the books, but who cares when it saves you \$238.

In 2008, for the first time, I kept a list of all the books that I read. I'm a pretty serious reader and always have a pleasure book on my nightstand. Every single one of these hardcover books I obtained at the Concord Public Library. If I were to have purchased these books at Amazon.com (something I never could actually afford), they would have cost me \$1,223.81. Luckily I would have qualified for free shipping.

The library has an extensive collection of movies, documentaries and TV shows on its DVD shelf. My household is cable-free, so all of our watching comes from Netflix, local rentals or library loans. I can safely estimate that I took out a DVD every other week or so - let's say 26 total.

If I'd rented them, it would have cost me \$4 per night. That's another \$104 saved. By the way, if you're a Red Sox fan and missed the 2004 World Series due to lack of cable, the library has all the ALCS and World Series games on DVD - without any commercials.

So let's add up my total savings so far last year:

Rare books: \$725 minus \$2 to purchase = net \$723.

Magazine subscriptions: \$183.89.

Museum passes: \$64.

College textbooks: \$238.

DVD rentals : \$104.

Miscellaneous reading books: \$1,223.81.

2008 grand total : \$2,536.70.

I probably should add that I had a few hefty fines for overdue returns, and one lost magazine that got left on a plane. So let's round down to an even \$2,500.

Now remember how we were pretending that my library card last year cost \$1,476? My library usage surpassed my out-of-pocket cost, since I received \$2,500 worth of media services from the library paid just \$1476 for my library pass. It's a great bargain when you look at it this way, isn't it?

Plus, the city threw in all the other services, like police, fire, trash pickup, and snowplowing for free.

(Mike Alberici of Concord is a music teacher in Hopkinton.)