

## Atwater Library updates its original vocation from 1828 for the digital world

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Going to a public library to learn digital media is kind of like getting your driver's licence at a stable.

As evidenced by my Gazette colleagues and I cowering in the fetal position under our desks and doubling up on 6/49 purchases, there is a fair degree of underarm wetness as we contemplate the role of the printed word in the digital world.

But while the Internet's steely grip on the future of media has some of us clutching our crystal balls, the Atwater Library is expanding the Web's reach. Since a pilot project in 2006, the library has run workshops on such digital media skills as the creation of Web pages and blogs, digital audio, video and photography.

The project brings together mentors who work in media with segments of the public underserved by the digital revolution.

A "wrap party" at the Atwater Library yesterday afternoon brought together 20 Digital Literacy Project participants from James Lyng High School, WORD Writing Our Rhymes Down, Jeunesse 2000, Project 10 and the RECLAIM Literacy Council. If the festive spirit moved them, they were free to peruse that old stuff lining the library's shelves.

Robin Kelley, the project coordinator, has studied at the University of Victoria and the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design.

She's working on a master's degree in library and information studies at McGill University and took on the Atwater job in August.

I asked Kelley about the meetings of the minds between digital professionals and novices.

"It went pretty cool," she said. "Structuring the workshops to meet their interests and needs in terms of literacy made it easier for them to engage.

"They were all really excited about what was going on in the workshops."



CREDIT: MARIE-FRANCE COALLIER, GAZETTE FILE

The Atwater Library began life as the Mechanics' Institute on St. James St., providing education and industrial training.

There was a wide range of media literacy among participants. The high school students work on computers at James Lyng and were excited about using editing software. Those from RECLAIM were computer rookies. The workshops were tailored to differing levels of ability.

Kelley and her staff were able to change on the fly. When the Jeunesse 2000 kids were less than fully committed to a video project, the workshop was changed to photography and got a better response.

The Atwater Library began life as the Mechanics' Institute on St. James St. in 1828. It provided education and trades training in the industries of the time, like drafting and construction.

The Digital Literacy Project is a contemporary take on that original vocation. The red-brick building at the corner of Atwater Ave. and Tupper St., which has housed the library since 1920, has a well-equipped computer room, video cameras and high-speed WiFi.

There will be another set of workshops in the new year. Kelley is finalizing the schedule, including a video project with the Centre for Family Continuity for Women, which works with female former prison inmates.

Kelley says this is how libraries are "re-establishing themselves in the digital era" - with community focus that addresses needs for digital literacy.

Now all they need is a virtual spinster to hiss a digital "Shhhh!"

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Last word - for now - on the wretched Spoonman.

The "music" might be easier to take if Cyrille Estève could turn his perennial frown upside-down once in a while.

But to borrow the immortal words former Alouettes head coach Don Matthews used to describe a sour beat writer, Spoonman looks "like a s--t salesman with a mouth full of samples."

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