

# POTTSTOWN CITIZENS FOR Enlightened LEADERSHIP

## Why I love the public library

On Tuesday I described the Pottstown Regional Public Library as the town's most cost-effective institution. Here's why:

### Accessible

Go to Pottstown Borough Hall, and you'll find a wall protecting public employees from the public.



Commentary by  
Tom Hylton

At the police department, codes, public works, finance, human resources — even parks

and recreation — the public has to stand at a "transactional window" to conduct business with staffers inside.

Likewise, all our public schools are locked tight. Visitors have to be buzzed in, signed in, and wearing badges. Even as a school board member, I have to be buzzed into the administration building and wear my identification badge.

Not so the public library, which is truly open to the public. Just walk right in and start browsing through its magazine or book collection or use its computers.

And the library is open until 8 p.m. three days a week, on Saturdays (and next year, perhaps, even on Sunday afternoons).

The staff doesn't wear identification badges. They don't need to. You can always tell them from their welcoming smile and helpful attitude.

### Democratic

Library patrons reflect the community it serves. Thanks to the library's passport office, even affluent citizens can be found at the library. Plenty of middle class families — especially those with children — come for books or the many organized activities offered.

But perhaps the largest group served by the library are low- and moderate-income residents.

To get a job these days, you need to apply on-line, and many people don't know how to do that.

The librarians will

help you on library computers. The staff is patient. And even homeless people coming inside just to get warm in wintertime are treated with respect.

My wife, who spends a lot of time volunteering at the library, often comments on how nice the staff is to all patrons, even those who would be labeled "emotional support" or "altered" in public schools (and once in a while, "hygiene-challenged").

### Frugal

The staff receives very modest wages compared to their counterparts in borough government and the school district. No ample pensions or Cadillac health benefits.

The library recently completed major renovations for just \$630,000. After seven years as a school director, I can guarantee those same renovations would have cost several million dollars if done at one of our public schools.

One small example: the library chairs and tables are the same ones used when the library moved to its current location in 1961. As part of the renovations, the chairs were spray-painted by the library custodian in tasteful colors. They look great.

### Fort Knox of knowledge

Books, music, videos, internet resources — everything's there at the public library. You can go on-line from home and browse the entire collection — not just Pottstown's, but almost everywhere in Pennsylvania. If the resource is in one of Montgomery County's 36 public libraries, you can probably get it in Pottstown within a few days. That's service!



**ADAPTIVE REUSE — The Pottstown Regional Public Library is perhaps Pottstown's best example of recycling a magnificent historic building. The library was originally built as the Pottstown Post Office in 1918. It retains many of its original architectural features.**