



Atlantic Canada Celebrates Games @ the Library



During the week of October 18 to 24, 2009, more than 3,000 Atlantic Canadians of all ages played games at more than 200 events at libraries in Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Prince Edward Island, and Newfoundland and Labrador. The events were part of the first Games @ the Library, sponsored by the Atlantic Provinces Library Association (APLA) and Hasbro Canada.

The goal of Games @ the Library was to promote libraries as places where people meet, learn and have fun. It seemed a natural fit to combine games and libraries. Games appeal to a wide range of ages. Traditional board and card games are rebounding in popularity, and video games are now so ubiquitous that even seniors are playing them. Public libraries are increasingly filling the role of community centre, and library programming is changing to reflect this need.

Games provide more than just fun. Playing games teaches critical thinking, strategy, etiquette and problem-solving skills. It can also provide an opportunity to develop social interactions, enhance numeracy and literacy skills, and even encourage physical fitness. Combine interest in games and their benefits with a place that welcomes all community members and you have Games @ the Library.

Come one, come all

This combination of fun, learning and socializing was evident in the variety of events that were promoted on the libraries' websites:

"Games we used to play at the Senior Café" – Pictou Public Library, Nova Scotia

"Children are invited to assemble at the library at 3:30 for an evening of games and a scavenger hunt" – Southern Harbour Public Library, Newfoundland

"DayTripping Recreation Services is bringing Geocaching to the library to help families celebrate *Games @ the Library Week*" – Saint John Free Public Library, New Brunswick

"Join us for a variety of games, such as, mini-golf in the library lobby, trivia with Alexander, Rock Band, Wii, Pente, Quarto, Tower of Hanoi, Chess, Crokinole" – Roberston Library, PEI



Photo credit: Sarah Gillis

Snakes & Ladders at Spring Garden Road Memorial Public Library

"Come on and get LOUD @ THE LIBRARY. We are having GAMES DAY at the public library, with board games such as Scrabble, Pictureka, Chess, Checkers and more. Card Games such as Skip Boo and Cribbage and Computer Games" – Daniel's Harbour, Newfoundland

"Board Games for Everyone – bring a game – or use ours – bring a friend – or meet someone new – play – snack – maybe win" – Colchester-East Hants Public Library, Stewiacke Branch, Nova Scotia

How did APLA get so many libraries and participants involved? An enthusiastic and generous sponsor, a coveted grand prize, combined with simple ways for libraries to participate, and four association members championing it at the provincial levels, got Games @ the Library off the ground with minimal expense and effort.

A very generous donation by Hasbro Canada of a copy of Scrabble® and Pictureka® to every public library in Atlantic Canada gave the event real momentum. This meant



Photo credit: Mylène May Gionet

Playing Twister at the Bibliothèque publique de Bas-Caraquet, New Brunswick

distributing (via each provincial public library system) a total of 548 games! Many libraries focused on this donation as both inspiration and promotion for their event. Even small libraries across the region that do not have game collections were able to host events thanks to Hasbro Canada's donation. Additionally, APLA donated a Nintendo Wii as a grand prize, and anyone in Atlantic Canada who participated in a Games @ the Library event could enter to win. A total of 2,751 ballots were received.

A natural fit

APLA made it simple for libraries to participate by creating and hosting a website, www.apla.ca/games, providing all the information they would need to plan, organize and promote a local event. The site included suggestions for events, downloadable promotional material including bookmarks and posters, and ballots for the grand prize draw. The site also included a message board where libraries could post information about their events. It was left up to individual libraries to decide what type of program would be best suited to their branch, which age groups they would target, and whether to hold one event or multiple events.

APLA is an association with four vice-presidents, one for each province. All VPs were eager to participate in the organization of Games @ the Library by promoting it to public libraries in their province, assisting in the distribution

of Hasbro Canada's donations, and communicating with libraries through their provincial listservs.

Envelopes containing hundreds of ballots, many clearly written by young children just learning to write, are real indicators of the events' success, as are the positive comments received from local libraries, such as:

"Much fun was enjoyed by all, and due to popular demand by our library patrons, we've added a few cribbage and Scrabble clubs to our growing roster of community clubs @ the library." – Pictou-Antigonish Regional Library, Nova Scotia

"I just wanted to let you know that I was quite pleased with *Games @ the Library*... we had 8 children come and participate in the games... they really enjoyed playing and then asked if they could drop in again to play those games." – St. Bride's, Cape Shore, Newfoundland (a small branch in a community of about 385)

Public libraries remain relevant and essential to communities, but we continually need to re-evaluate our collections and services to ensure we are meeting the ever-changing needs of our users. Many members of our communities, from young children to senior citizens, continue to turn to libraries to fulfill their educational, social and entertainment needs. Games @ the Library was one way to challenge libraries to try an innovative approach to programming.



Photo credit: Trina Rogers

Grand-prize winner, Michaela Hunt of Centreville, NL, with Stephanie Collins of the Intertown Public Library

Whether on a small scale (a local branch hosting a Scrabble® tournament) or a large scale, like simultaneous regional events, libraries are only limited by the enthusiasm, energy and creativity of their staff. Games @ the Library was an opportunity to inspire staff to get involved, to promote libraries, to attract new users and to demonstrate that libraries remain the "go to" place to fulfill a wide variety of community needs. 🐾

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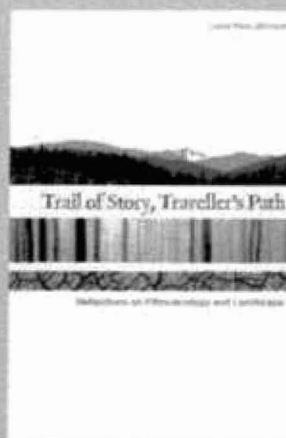
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