

# Merchandising the Collection:

## Trading Spaces: Reinventing the Library Environment

Final Report to the New Jersey State Library from the South Jersey Regional Library Cooperative August 2004

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The goal of the "Trading Spaces" project was no less than to change the public perception of libraries in New Jersey. We would accomplish this by helping one library to change itself, thereby changing the vision of the library for its own staff and customers, and ultimately for the New Jersey librarians who would see the difference in a library that was very much like their own.

An objective of the project was to demonstrate the use of affordable merchandising techniques in a library -- and we did!

**With a total budget of \$45,000, the Mount Laurel Library** embraced retail display and practices to create a WOW customer experience for Mount Laurel Library users, transformed ten areas in the library and established Greeter as a staff role. For details and pictures, see the Mount Laurel Library report to the South Jersey Regional Library Cooperative (SJRLC) that follows.

An objective of the project was to assist libraries in making the policy, cultural and physical changes necessary to effectively manage, organize and display their collections – and we did!

More than 500 NJ Library Staff have participated in workshops and/or tours or attended conference programs on the Trading Spaces Project!

### **The Mount Laurel Library has...**

- Provided a demonstration site to train library staff and trustees from throughout New Jersey.
- Developed before and after slides and a PowerPoint presentation and presented at New Jersey Library Network workshops, the New Jersey Library Association Conference, NJ Library Leadership Institute and monthly SJRLC programs at the library. Other presentations are scheduled for fall 2004.

### **The South Jersey Regional Library Cooperative has...**

- Presented two New Jersey Library Network all-day workshops to unveil the results.
- Developed a Trading Spaces website featuring project information, workshop presentations, supporting resources and interactive map/photos of the Mount Laurel Library at <http://www.sjrlc.org/tradingspaces/>
- Developed a Trading Spaces Listserv to foster a dialogue among libraries implementing merchandising principles, as demonstrated at the Mount Laurel Library.
- Sponsored monthly program/tours of the Mount Laurel Library.
- Surveyed workshop/tour attendees to find out what changes are completed, in process, in planning, or under consideration as a result of the Trading Spaces demonstration project.

For more information on all of the above, see: <http://www.sjrlc.org/tradingspaces/>

**More than 90% of respondents** have ...created temporary displays or improved/added new signage -- or are in planning/process/consideration to make those changes as a result of the project.

**More Than 80% of respondents** have instituted a wireless network or purchased fixtures/accessories or grouped parts of the collection for easier browsing or conducted a customer survey or created/significantly changed an area of the library or created/modified a library policy or had staff discussion about merchandising the collection -- or are in planning/process/consideration to make those changes as a result of the project.

**More Than 70% of respondents** have purchased furniture or added new media formats or conducted a staff “walk through” of the library or modified/created staff duties (i.e. Greeter role, merchandising) collection -- or are in planning/process/consideration to make those changes as a result of the project.

**More than 60% of respondents** began offering or allowing food and/or beverages in the library -- or are in planning/process/consideration to make that change as a result of the project.

An objective of the project was to demonstrate increased use, circulation and customer satisfaction with the library and its collection by using merchandising techniques --- and we did!

**Mount Laurel Library** saw a 40% increase in total circulation when the project was fully implemented! Not only has circulation increased, but also they've seen an increase in the number of people visiting the library, based on gate counts which have reached an all-time high. Throughout the project, the library collected written user feedback forms, which were overwhelmingly positive:

*It's nice to know we are evolving with new ideas, creativity and decorative ideas to invite more visitors and readership.*

*I just love the displays of the books and tapes!*

*I think this is the coolest library ever!*

The Trading Spaces project succeeded beyond our wildest expectations and despite our occasional fears...

Could a consultant from California mentor this much change from 3,000 miles away? Could the Mount Laurel management, board and staff really have the nerve to make this much change in a library that people liked to start with? How much could we actually do with \$45,000? Could we get it all ready to show in nine months? Would library staff that never traveled south of Trenton see and follow the lead of a library from South Jersey? Could the South Jersey Library Cooperative sustain the momentum beyond a one-shot wonder after the party was over? The answer to all of these was absolutely yes!

There have been other merchandising projects in libraries across the US – although not nearly enough. Why is this one different?

**The idea was ambitious from the start.** We aimed big --- not just to buy bookstore furniture but to change the staff culture and customer experience in the library.

**The project is replicable.** We aimed big with \$45,000 -- a figure within the redesign budget of many libraries. Librarians love to ooh and ah over \$80 million buildings. Thank heaven they exist, but 99.9% of us aren't going to have one. Any library can make these changes. Many have way more than \$45,000 to spend. A library with only \$5,000 can get started with a punch up to their entrance or children's room that shows what can be done.

**The library is a model.** The stage was set for Trading Spaces at the Mount Laurel Library before the South Jersey Regional Library Cooperative got there. Mount Laurel's community based strategic planning process had already identified the importance of comfortable space and convenient access to collections as high priorities.

**We made this happen quickly.** The Trading Spaces project went from idea to fruition --- including board approvals at SJRLC and Mount Laurel Library, contracts from the State Library and SJRLC and SJRLC with Mount Laurel, securing consultant services and doing all of the work -- in one year! Why did we do it so quickly? Because we wanted to change the public perception of libraries in New Jersey and we believe we are running out of time to do it.

**We showed what people can do when they play their roles well. Specifically we had...**

**An Instigator:** SJRLC Executive Director Karen Hyman believed that New Jersey libraries could do a way better job of merchandising their collections and creating a customer-centered experience and that they needed an example closer than California to make it happen. She got the ball rolling and secured the funds to do it.

**An Advancer:** State Librarian Norma Blake's enthusiasm, immediate offer of matching funds and perception that this would be like "Trading Spaces" in a library named the project and shot it out of the starting gates. From start to finish, Norma put the credibility of the State Library and her own enthusiasm behind the project.

**An Expert:** Dave Genesy knew how to transform libraries from years of experience doing it as Innovative Services Librarian at San Jose Public Library. SJRLC got the best to mentor us from inspirational training, through the original walkthrough and design, to many telephone and onsite adjustments along the way.

**A Leader:** Mount Laurel Library Director Joan Bernstein had set the stage for change. Her ability to move this project forward quickly and well is testimony to her nerve and vision and the quality of her board, staff and community relationships that were years in the making.

**A Manager:** Kathy Schalk-Greene, Mount Laurel Library Assistant Director and Trading Spaces Project Manager was the heart, soul and backbone of the project from her initial "walk throughs" with the entire staff, through the hundreds of remodeling decisions, installation, and workshops/tours showcasing the results. Kathy's extraordinary teambuilding skills and focus on excellence lifted the project to another level.

**An Expediter:** Peter Bromberg, SJRLC Program Coordinator created the project website, listserv and monthly programs/tours at the Mount Laurel Library and has surveyed attendees to measure our success four months later. Peter Bromberg has grown the project from a one-hit wonder to a continuing factor in NJ library development.

Last and certainly not least, we had organizational support and exceptional flexibility:

**From the South Jersey Regional Library Cooperative,** an organization with a proven track record in envisioning, developing and supporting incubator projects to foster change. At the SJRLC Fat Tuesday Planning Day, participants asked for help with visual management of the library. The SJRLC Board was quick with their faith and support for this new type of project. SJRLC staff participated in every consulting visit and workshop and even moved furniture!

**From the New Jersey State Library** who operated with the highest degree of enthusiasm, responsiveness, flexibility and speed to deliver support and add their credibility to the project. The State Library's support changed Trading Spaces from a regional to a statewide project.

**From the Mount Laurel Library.** Would the Library Board like to approve \$15,000 in matching funds for an as yet undocumented project that would transform the library they loved in a variety of unspecified ways? They said yes enthusiastically and the rest is NJ Library history and the future!



# Merchandising the Collection: Trading Spaces: Reinventing the Library Environment

Final Report to South Jersey Regional Library Cooperative from the Mount Laurel Library

August 2004

The Mount Laurel Library was selected as a statewide demonstration site to use retail-merchandising techniques in a library setting with the project running from July 2003 to June 2004. The New Jersey State Library, the South Jersey Regional Library Cooperative (SJRLC) and Mount Laurel Library provided funding jointly.

**Project Goal:** To reinvent library environments through use of retail merchandising practices

**Objectives:** To demonstrate the use of affordable merchandising techniques in a library.

To assist libraries in making the policy, cultural and physical changes necessary to effectively manage, organize and display their collections.

To demonstrate increased use, circulation and customer satisfaction with the library and its collection by using merchandising techniques.



*One example of the project's impact is the former Children's Room. Tall shelving was removed, colorful paint replaced grey walls, books were displayed on slat wall, comfortable seating and colorful accessories were added to make this new Family Room a friendly space for young readers.*

*Initial public reaction to the Family Room has been very positive. "When did you buy all those new books?" "When did you put in windows?" (Same books and windows.) One mom says, "Now I come into the library and just shop the wall."*



**For a virtual tour of the reinvented Mount Laurel Library and more project background see [www.sjrlc.org/tradingspaces](http://www.sjrlc.org/tradingspaces)**

## The Bottom Line

**Funding Partners:** New Jersey State Library, South Jersey Regional Library Cooperative, Mount Laurel Library each contributed \$15,000 for a project budget of \$45,000.

The South Jersey Regional Library Cooperative funded consulting and training by project consultant Dave Genesy.

The Mount Laurel Library paid for a new DVD collection and wireless network from non-project library funds.

## What We Did at a Glance:

- **Embraced retail display and practices to create a WOW customer experience for Mount Laurel Library users**
- **Transformed ten areas in the library**
  1. *Movies & Music*
  2. *Marketplace of New & Popular Books*
  3. *Internet Café with vending*
  4. *Juvenile*
  5. *Family Room for Young Readers*
  6. *Teen Zone*
  7. *Audiobook Avenue*
  8. *Popular Nonfiction*
  9. *Slatwall shelf end displays*
  10. *Living Room for Magazines & Quiet Reading*
- **Established Greeter as a staff role**  
*Library staff of all levels and from all departments are trained to help customers on the library floor (not at desks) during all public hours.*
- **Provided a demonstration site to train library staff and trustees throughout New Jersey**  
*Over 300 people have visited the library or attended programs on the Trading Spaces project. Monthly tours for continue.*
- **Installed a wireless network and started an entertainment DVD collection of 1,000+ titles**  
*Paid for by Library funds outside of this project.*
- **Saw a 40% increase in total circulation**  
*When the project was fully implemented*

## Implementation: Who helped make this happen?

The Trading Spaces Demonstration project was a true collaboration with many people contributing to its success.

### Mount Laurel Community Focus Groups

This project was firmly based on input from community focus groups gathered during the Library's strategic planning process in 2002-03. All of the pieces eventually included in the Trading Spaces project were originally suggested by our community – a café, more comfort, greater usability of the library by all ages, more popular materials in all formats, and greater access and use of technology.

### Norma Blake, NJ State Librarian, Karen Hyman, Executive Director, South Jersey Regional Library Cooperative and the Mount Laurel Library Board of Trustees

The Trading Spaces project was the joint creation of South Jersey Regional Library Cooperative Executive Director, Karen Hyman and State Librarian, Norma Blake. The New Jersey State Library, South Jersey Regional Library Cooperative, and the Mount Laurel Library with each contributing \$15,000 provided funding. In addition, the project consultant services of Dave Genesy were funded by the South Jersey Regional Library Cooperative.

### Dave Genesy, Consultant

Dave Genesy is now the director of the Redwood City Public Library and formerly Innovative Services Manager of the San Jose Public Library (*Library Journal's* 2004 Library of the Year). With a professional background in both retail merchandising and librarianship, he took the Library's 2003-06 strategic plan, collection and circulation statistics, and after a one-day training session and meeting with staff, came up with a workable plan which transformed ten major areas of the library.

His plan included not only a new physical layout of the library for customer use and comfort, but also re-focused collection development on current community needs and desires, and advised the library on how to better utilize staff to do business in new ways.

After an initial site visit in July 2003, Dave made two other site visits to the library. In January 2004 he trained staff as well "tweaking" the furniture layout for increased impact. Between visits Dave was available via phone, email and virtual project-in-progress visits through photos posted to the Internet. In March 2004 he helped staff formulate next steps and led two Trading Spaces workshops in Mount Laurel and Monroe Township Library showing the implementation of the full project with the Library's project team.



### Merchandising Team

An eight-person project team coordinated the implementation. The team included all staff from all departments and at all levels, both full- and part-time.

*Shown from left receiving the SJRLC Library Service Award are Mount Laurel Library Director Joan Bernstein, Becky Boydston, South Jersey Regional Library Cooperative Executive Director Karen Hyman, Kathy Kasprzyk, Assistant Director Kathy Schalk-Greene (project manager), Eileen Gallagher and Angel Kuntz. (Not shown: C.L. Quillen-Cornwall and Lisa Whitley.)*

### Peter Bromberg, SJRLC Program Development Coordinator

Pete Bromberg provided technical assistance by taking numerous photographs throughout the project to document dramatic transformations, along with library staffer Kate Dougherty. He facilitated meetings as staff grappled with developing public service approaches in a new environment. Peter also developed and maintains the project website, [www.sjrlc.org/tradingspaces](http://www.sjrlc.org/tradingspaces).

### Library Staff, Volunteer and Customer Involvement

Every staff member and volunteer played an active role since the library remained open during implementation. Before the project staff did walk-throughs of the library and asked how the library was easy (or hard) to navigate for a first time visitor, as well as their own wish list for the library. As the project continued more feedback was gathered, in small group settings, at staff meetings and in writing.

Customers were given bookmarks with a written overview of the project and feedback forms to help name areas and get their reaction. Their suggestions were read, taken to heart and acted on.

*Shown at right Mount Laurel Staff with trainer Kathleen Carr at a Team Building Workshop, December 2003.*



## Implementation Timeline: What was done?

	Policy Changes	Cultural Changes	Physical Changes
July		Staff Walk-through #1: Project overview, Wish List for Changes  Consultant Site Visit#1 "Retooling the Library while the Engine is Running"	
August		Staff Walk-through #2 Plan overview, What concerns/excites you?	
September			
October		Staff Breakfast to unveil Map of the plan	Book Gondolas CD Browsers installed
November	Popular Nonfiction Collections established	Map of plan displayed for customers public  Maintaining merchandising displays becomes regular part of staff routine	Completed Music Area (of Movies & Music) Marketplace Audiobook Avenue Living Room Popular Nonfiction
December		Staff Training: Merchandising 101 Training Teambuilding workshop with staff/volunteers	
January	DVD entertainment collection developed	Consultant Site Visit#2 Mini-merchandising Training  Staff Training: Rethinking Public Services Roles	Slatwall ends installed
February	Magazines start circulating	Presentation at NJLA Building Fair	Completed Juvenile area Teen Zone Internet Café
March	DVDs circulate  Self-checkout trial starts	Greeter schedule starts  Establish "Morning briefing" for daily staff update  Consultant Site Visit#3  Presentation: Trading Spaces Workshops at Mount Laurel Library & Monroe Township	Completed Movies (of Movies & Music) Family Room Self Checkout Wireless Network
April		Presentation at NJLA Annual Conference	
May		Staff Walk-Through #3: Project Evaluation  Staff Training: Greeter: It's More than Hello	
June		Presentation: Trading Spaces Tour	

## How Library Customers and the Library Benefited:

- **Increased circulation**

When the project was fully implemented, overall circulation of library items increased 40% for April- June 2004 over the same period in 2003.

	2003	2004	% Increase from '03 to '04	2004 Magazines	% of Monthly Circ	2004 DVDs	% of Monthly Circ
April	24,971	34,821	<b>39%</b>	496	1%	5,230	15%
May	24,041	31,393	<b>31%</b>	438	1%	4,736	15%
June	25,819	38,511	<b>49%</b>	547	1%	5,792	15%
Total	74,831	104,725	<b>40%</b>	1,481	1%	15,758	15%

- **High levels of library customer user satisfaction with the merchandising plan**

Throughout the project, the library collected written user feedback forms, which were overwhelmingly positive:

*It's nice to know we are evolving with new ideas, creativity and decorative ideas to invite more visitors and readership.*

*I just love the displays of the books and tapes!*

*I think this is the coolest library ever!*

- **Increased awareness of the library in the community**

Not only has circulation increased, but also we've seen an increase in the number of people visiting the library, based on our gate counts which have reached an all-time high.

The Mount Laurel Library is recognized as an innovative leader among New Jersey libraries through the workshops and positive media coverage we've received. In July 2004, the Library was identified by the NJ State Library as one of three "great libraries in the state" to the Americans for Libraries Council, which advocates for libraries at the national level and develops and promotes programs aimed at realizing the potential of libraries in the 21st century.

## Positive Lessons Learned

- **Dramatic change yields dramatic results.**

Unique and comfortable areas for different customer groups, such as families with young children, teens and those wanting a quiet reading area can each have a dramatically different look and feel within the library..

Changing a number of areas at once had greater total impact than a piecemeal approach. It showed a strong single vision for the whole library, and so change itself became an event involving staff and customers alike.

- **Involve everyone in changes**

Time invested in listening to, involving, and training staff before, during and after implementation yielded high returns in buy-in to the project and presenting a common message to the public. Having cross-departmental teams with all staff levels directing the project was a major factor in success, along with involving other staff in specific subteam projects through the implementation.

Customers were kept "in the loop" with a large-scale map of the final layout and "Look for Changes" signs posted as areas were transformed. Public feedback forms available throughout the process kept lines of communication open.

- **Mess equals success.**

A messy area in the library means people have been touching, "messaging up" the displays and borrowing stuff. This is a *good* thing and not a source of irritation. Staff maintain the library-wide displays every day, throughout the day to keep our library looking comfortable and easy-to-browse by our customers.

- **Practice pro-active customer service.**

Bring staff out to customers, rather than make customers come to staff desks using roles such as the Greeter.

## Practically speaking...

- **You don't need a huge investment to create a big impact.**  
The total project budget was a modest \$45,000. Several areas required more sweat equity and imagination than money. Just painting a bright color made a big change in our Juvenile area. Our Living Room was created by reconfiguring shelving we already owned.
- **Furniture matters.**  
Wood bookstore-style shelves tilt back so books stay up when placed cover-out. This approach just doesn't work on standard library metal shelving. Slat wall on shelf ends and walls expand display opportunities for books and magazines, as well as improved signage. Acrylic book holders for slatwall (and plenty of them).
- **Give people a WOW experience on entering the library.**  
Put high impact (and demand) items as people first enter, like DVDs and music.
- **Move teens away from the children's area**  
They don't want to be anywhere near smaller kids, anyway.

## ...and the Negatives Lessons (or the Reality Checks)

- **Everything has a trade-off.**  
A common reaction from librarians on seeing the library is: With everything on display, how do you ever find anything? Do you change the catalog to match the merchandising?

Our library never used a "New Shelf" or "On Display" location in our online catalog, and we still don't.

We made a strategic decision to catalog just once, and get titles out for customers to use, rather than keep them in a back room and spend staff time reclassifying items to always reflect changing locations over time. We train staff and customers to look in the Marketplace of New Books for titles from the last two years.

The trade-off here are that sometimes it takes looking in several different areas to find a specific item, or not finding it at all. Our higher overall use by customers and a more efficient use of staff balances the occasional need to put an item on a trace list to find later.

- **It's easy to buy furniture. It's hard to change behavior.**  
Learning and then making a habit of new behaviors is challenging and takes time.

When we started merchandising we weren't very good at it and it didn't get done consistently. Over time we're improving our techniques, training, and commitment to maintain our merchandising displays all day, every day. But it takes constant vigilance and reinforcement to keep the collection merchandised and the library looking attractive.

Starting a new staff role of Greeter felt very uncomfortable at first for many, and this was the first public service role for some of our staff.



Merchandising the Collection:  
Trading Spaces Demonstration Project

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from the Mount Laurel Library

1. Movies & Music



4. Juvenile Fiction



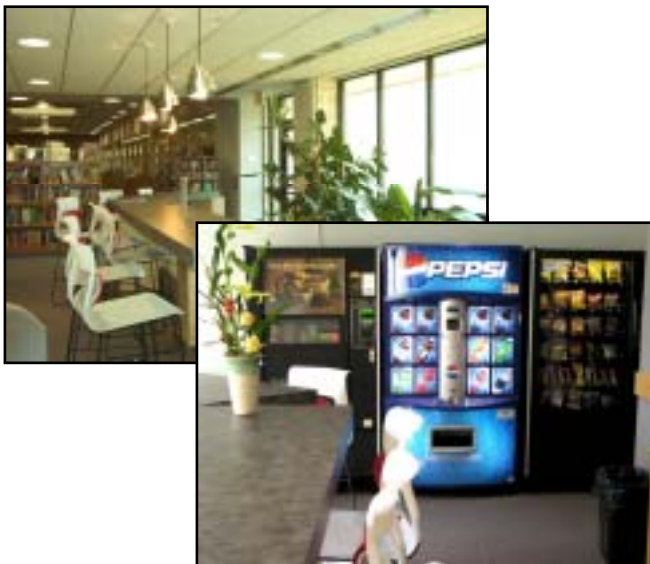
2. Marketplace of New and Popular Books



5. Family Room for Young Readers



3. Internet Café



6. Teen Zone



*Photographs by  
Kate Dougherty, Mount Laurel Library  
and Peter Bromberg,  
South Jersey Regional Library Cooperative*

7. Audiobook Avenue



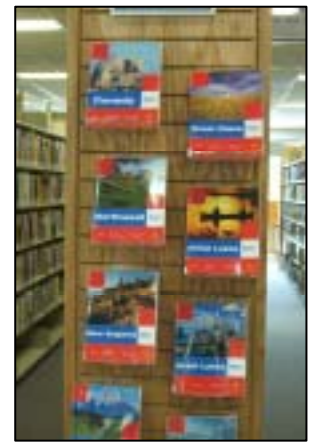
10. Living Room for Magazines & Quiet Reading



8. Popular Nonfiction



9. Slatwall shelf end displays



# MOUNT LAUREL LIBRARY GREETER

*Our goal: To have mobile knowledgeable staff available to help customers as they enter the building.*



*The following are current guidelines. We'll make changes as we learn more.*

## **GREETERS HELP CUSTOMERS**

*These are top priorities*

- Be available in the Marketplace area to assist customers
- Assist customers in locating items in the catalog and on the shelves
- Assist and train customers to search catalog
- Assist customers with self-checkout
- Hand off customer reference questions to other staff
- Assist/train customers on different options to check library accounts, fines, renew, reserves
- Assist customers with photocopiers

## **WHEN NOT HELPING CUSTOMERS:**

*These are secondary priorities*

- Shelve new books and DVDs
- Merchandise in the Marketplace, Movies & Music, Juvenile Media, Popular Non-Fiction, Audio Books
- Straighten and replenish handouts and brochures
- Count statistics and log questions (about being a greeter)

## **Greeters Don't**

- Shelf read (it takes too much focused attention and makes us seem unapproachable)
- Answer reference questions. As greeter, hand off to a librarian when possible/practical.