

The Daily Review

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2.7 MILLION BAY AREA READERS WEEKLY IN PRINT AND ONLINE

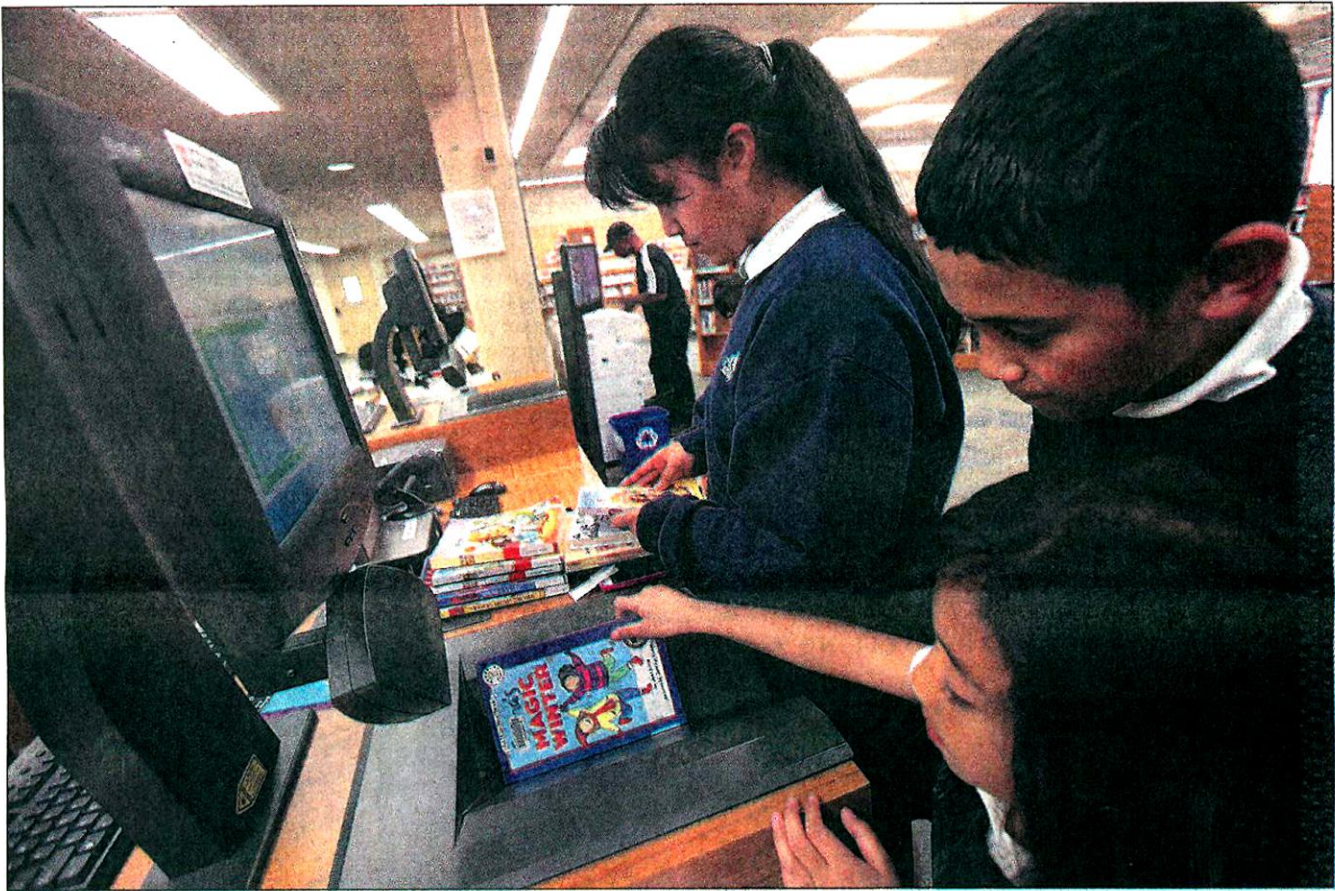
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NEW LIFE FOR CARD CATALOGS

Library branches out

Seed lending program comes amid a surge in the number of patrons



ARIC CRABB/STAFF PHOTOS

Malia Otuhiva, from left, her brother Soane and her sister Cecilia use a self-checkout computer at the Hayward Main Library on Tuesday. Below is a card catalog cabinet that has been brought out of storage and repurposed for a new seed lending library.



By Rebecca Parr

rparr@bayareanewsgroup.com

HAYWARD — City librarians have found a novel purpose for those old card catalog cabinets, a throwback to the days before computers began helping patrons locate books — which they are checking out in ever-increasing numbers.

Two of the city library's old card catalogs have been brought out of storage, repurposed for Hayward's new seed lending library. It turns out that the wooden

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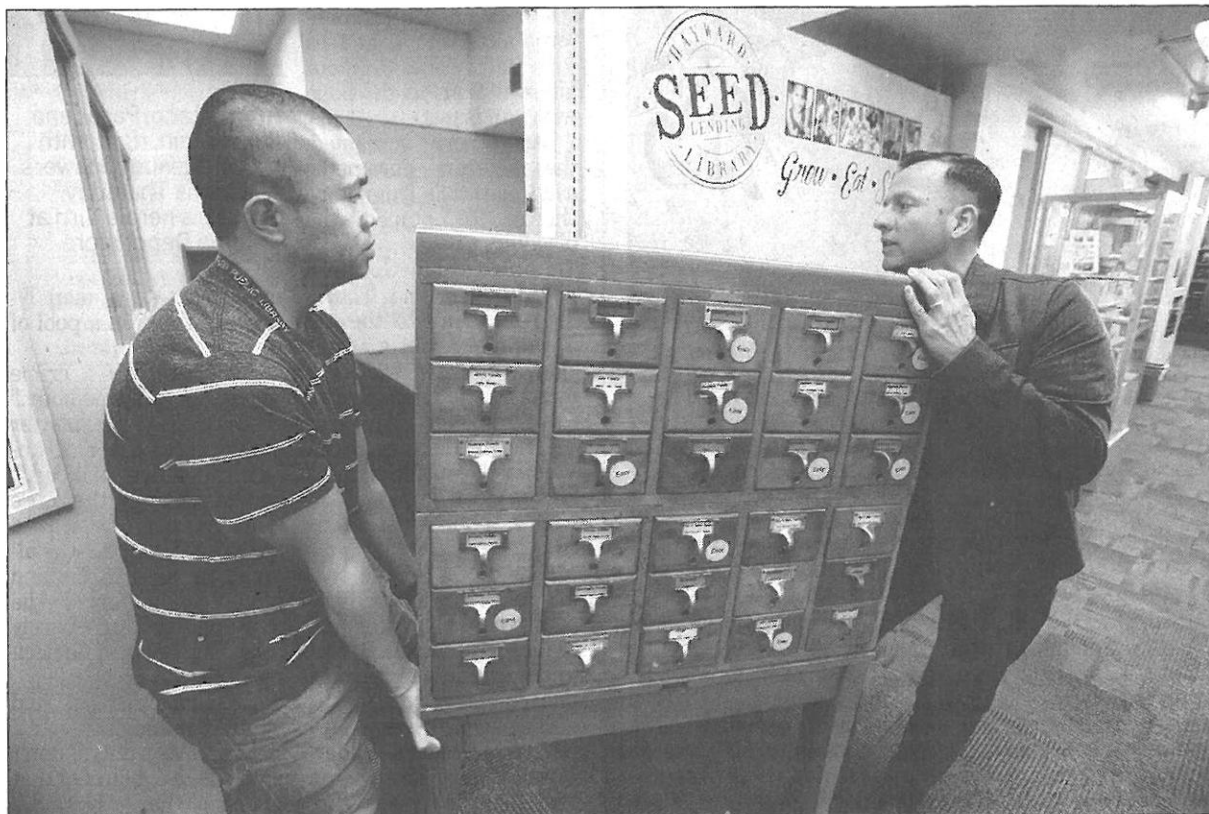
SEED LENDING LIBRARY OPENING

Seeds can be checked out and either taken home or planted during a "plant-a-thon." There also will be exercise classes, health information, story times and entertainment.

When: 11 a.m.-3:30 p.m. Saturday

Where: Hayward Main Library, 835 C St.

Also: Weekes Branch Library, 27300 Patrick Ave., will have a seed planting from 2 to 4 p.m. Saturday.



ARIC CRABB/STAFF

Senior library page Quang Duong, left, and library director Sean Reinhart move a card catalog cabinet into position at the Hayward Main Library. The cabinet has been repurposed for the new seed lending library.

Library

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file cabinets are the perfect size to hold the seed envelopes, said Sean Reinhart, library director. "It's really satisfying to see those card catalogs come back into use in a way everyone can enjoy them, not just antique dealers," he said.

Hayward was one of the first libraries to computerize its catalog in the 1980s. Before, information about a book was printed on a card that was placed in small, deep file drawers contained in a cabinet.

Though much has changed in libraries since then, one pre-computer feature is more popular than ever: books.

"Even as people access more information online, we had 1.3 million items checked out last year," Reinhart said. While that number includes DVDs, audiobooks and some magazines, most are books. The library has seen a 10 percent increase in items checked out each year for the past four years, Reinhart said.

Hayward's numbers re-

fect a nationwide trend, with the number of items checked out from libraries at an all-time high, he said. Statewide, there has been a 19 percent increase in circulation per capita over the past five years, according to the California State Library.

The Alameda County Library has seen a 21 percent increase the past five years, said Peggy Watson, head of library branches. The Alameda County Library has branches in Castro Valley, San Lorenzo, Union City, Newark, Fremont, Albany and Dublin.

The number of items checked out at those libraries was 5.6 million in 2007-08, rising to 6.8 million by 2011-12, according to the library's website.

Hayward has focused on customer service and educational support services, such as homework centers, which have attracted people to the libraries, Reinhart said. And he credits the downturn in the economy as another big reason for the increase in items being checked out. "More people are looking for more value in their lives, and more people are discovering, or

should I say rediscovering, that the public library is a really great value," he said.

To kick off its latest offering, the seed lending library, the city is hosting a fair Saturday that will include information from health care agencies and exercise classes. The repurposed card catalogs, filled with seeds, will be prominently featured on the first floor.

Those taking part Saturday will be able to plant their seeds in biodegradable seed pots. The pots will be cared for on the main library's roof for four weeks, and then the seedlings can be taken home. The seed lending library is open to all California residents. Most of the seeds are vegetables, but there are some flowers.

The seeds can also be checked out for growing at home.

Saturday's fair marks the beginning of a four-week Seed Read program to promote literacy, healthy living, sustainable gardening and access to locally grown fresh produce. It will include exercise, gardening and cooking classes; book discussions and readings; and family entertainment.

The library director has been asked numerous times if the old card catalogs were for sale, but his answer has always been no.

"They're public property; they belong to the library. And they're such an emblematic symbol of the library's rich history," he said. Reinhart, who grew up in Hayward, remembers going to the main library and using the card catalogs as a child.

"I knew they still had value and utility," he said. "It was just a matter of finding a use for them."

The library has other reminders of its pre-computer days stashed away in a storage facility at the city corporation yard, including those little paper pockets that were pasted on the inside of books to hold the cards that showed who had checked out the books. The cards were hand-stamped with the date.

"I know there's that perfect thing to bring those back into use," Reinhart said, "but I just don't know what it is yet."

Contact Rebecca Parr at 510-293-2473; follow her at [Twitter.com/rdparr1](https://twitter.com/rdparr1).