

Books that bind the community



Ericka Hill, teen librarian, said her favorite part of working at the Stanford L. Warren library is building relationships with customers.

Warren library still a staple for African-Americans in Durham

By Alexis Alston and Oliva Browning
The Durham Voice

The Stanford L. Warren library started in the basement of a church in 1913 as the first African-American library in Durham. Since moving to its current location at 1201 Fayetteville Street in 1940, it has remained an important hub for the city's African-American community.

Hillside High School student Aaliyah Jackson has been visiting the Stanford L. Warren library since she was a little girl.

"I started going to the library because my grandpa shares its name, Stanford, and it's close to my house," she said. "I love the selection of books that this library has. I really like their action and science books. A lot of them stick with you and help you with real life situations."

Librarian Myrtle Darden said the Warren library, which is part of the Durham County Library system, is a historically rich community institution.

"It's neat to have customers come in and say, 'I remember this place from when I was a little girl,' or to look at the old pictures on our wall and be able to identify themselves," Darden said.

Darden has worked at the Warren library for eight years and has worked in the Durham County Library system for 28 years. She said with Durham County's Main Library under construction, more customers have been coming to the Warren library and reserves have picked up.

"We're glad they're coming here," Darden said. "We're actually extending our Friday hours to stay open later for customers."

The Warren library is an essential community resource for teenagers. Ericka Hill, a 27-year-old NCCU graduate, works specifically with teenagers at the library.

"My job is to create programming that engages the teens in the community," Hill said. "I also do outreach, so I go to the middle schools, the high schools and the Durham Youth Home and do programs there as well."

Hill said she tries to create programs after school hours for teens at the library, which she views as a haven in the community.

"This is a safe place," she said. "I like that I can provide resources that help them be here and not out there indulging in things that they aren't supposed to."

Hill plans a variety of fun and educational activities, from movies to science programs.

Last week, the library held its own cupcake war. Teens frosted popular story characters like Cookie Monster and Elmo onto their cupcakes, but Hill said a design of Japanese cartoon character Naruto took the cake.

Since the Main Library closed, Hill said even more teens are coming to her programs held on Mondays and Wednesdays. Her favorite part of her job is building lifelong relationships with the kids.

"I love it," Hill said. "It doesn't take that long for them to warm up to me."

Children under 11 are encouraged to come to the library with parental supervision, and the library has programs for adults as well.

"We offer computer classes that focus on a variety of topics like Microsoft or resume building," Darden said. "A lot of people come to the library to apply for jobs."

Darden, like Hill, is passionate about her job. She said her favorite part of working at the Warren library is interacting with the people.

"I love learning things from new people, listening to people's stories and doing more research on things I don't know," Darden said. "I like to know that I am fulfilling a need in this community and that they know we are here to help them."