

This is how The Friends
creates **stronger libraries** for
stronger communities.



Impact Spotlight:
Library Resources Devoted
to Workforce Development

A New Business is Born

Darren and his wife Oie worked in the same professions for most of their adult lives. While successful in their careers, they both longed for a change of pace – a challenge that would satisfy their need to work with both passion and purpose.

Since their first love has always been the outdoors, Darren and Oie decided to pursue a career path that would not only get them outside, but one that would encourage others to do so as well. After deciding to open an outdoor-focused retail store, the couple attended classes through the SCORE program at the George Latimer Central Library Workforce and Innovation Center every weekend for two months. They didn't expect the level of personalized service they received as they crafted their business plan.

In the fall of 2016, the couple founded DIRO Outdoors, and Darren was able to quit his job to focus on the new business fulltime. The concept, a mobile company that hosts excursions and brings outdoor gear directly to customers, is actually a different business model than their original retail idea. According to Darren, the library classes “reminded us to always be flexible and nimble.”

Because of this mindset, he says he and his wife

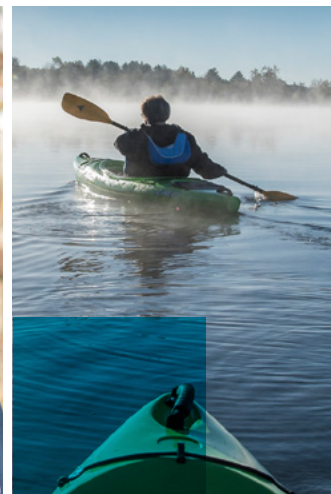
actually ended up with a business that is a better fit for them. “I’m definitely happier now,” he says.

Darren and his wife still use the library frequently with their children. “The library brings people together,” Darren says. “It’s a place to come together around community and information.”

Darren and his wife own DIRO Outdoors. www.dirooutdoors.com



Darren and Oie took classes at the Workforce and Innovation Center before launching their business



Helen got small business help at Rondo Library



Staying on the Cutting Edge

Helen Miller is an entrepreneur at heart. “I can see myself doing any number of things and being happy,” she says. The 30-year Twin Cities resident has launched various businesses during her career and has run a custom upholstery shop for the past 16 years. One of the secrets to her success is that Helen is always learning.

When Helen wanted to learn about traditional and modern upholstery techniques, she took apart vintage furniture to see how each piece was crafted. She attended upholstery classes to learn from the best in the field.

“You can have the same business for 16 years, but you have to do business differently each year. You have to tweak your business plan frequently.”

– Helen Miller, Owner Miller Upholstery

And when Helen wanted to learn more about running her business, she came to the library. Helen attended the Neighborhood Development Center small business classes at Rondo Library where she learned about how to segment and target different audiences in a changing market.

Because these library services are free and open to the public, Helen was able to find the data she needed and get access to various small business resources that otherwise wouldn't have been available to her.

Helen has always been a library fan. “You find what you need at the library,” she says. She predicts the library will become more of a community center in the future—a place to get information and, at the same time, connect to other people.

Helen owns Miller Upholstering. www.millerupholstering.com

The Library Sets the Standard

During the recession, newly unemployed Minnesotans flooded the library for job-seeking help. Because basic computer skills are increasingly necessary for even entry-level employment, library staff determined they needed a quick way to assess the computer skills of those seeking assistance.

In 2010, the Saint Paul Public Library and the Saint Paul Community Literacy Consortium began a community process to design a meaningful set of standards for basic digital literacy. Collaborators from non-profit agencies, public and academic libraries, Minnesota Department of Education, DEED and workforce centers, Adult Basic Education professionals, and others from across the region came together and created a set of standards that then led to the development of an online assessment which would certify competence, the Northstar Digital Literacy Assessment. Today, in a proctored setting, adults can take this assessment and if they pass, they receive a certificate that helps them demonstrate basic digital competency and provides a credential to share with potential employers. If they do not pass, libraries and other agencies offer computer classes to build the needed skills.

In 2014, the Northstar Standards were adopted as statewide digital literacy standards by Minnesota Adult Basic Education and were integrated into the new Minnesota Adult Diploma. Today, organizations and employers in more than 30 states, Canada, and South Africa are using the standards.

“When people take the Northstar Digital Literacy Assessment, they prove to themselves and others that they can successfully learn important twenty-first century skills that assist with finding a job, going to school, and participating online. The assessment also helps the library measure and prove skill gain for users, and reinforces the library’s role in providing access and education to information and computer technology.”

– Rebecca Ryan, Saint Paul Public Library



The Friends' Impact at a Glance

1,430,267

Northstar Digital Literacy
Assessments completed

Over **2,500** people who
received job placement
training in 2016

Over **50** different types of classes offered
at the Workforce and Innovation Center

260 active users of the Innovation
Lab that work with the 3D printer, laser
engraver, recording studio, and more

Classes in **7** languages through the
Mobile WORKplace



Job seekers and career-focused adults are just some of the groups that benefit from The Friends' support. The Friends raises over \$1.5 million a year to provide free resources and learning opportunities that enrich the lives of learners of every age and socioeconomic background. Visit www.thefriends.org to learn more.

What is a library? That seemingly simple question is front of mind for many people these days. In these earliest weeks of my tenure as the Friends' new president, I can tell you what I have observed: libraries are doing everything possible to be what people need them to be. They are a host and home for book clubs, a safe after-school destination for students, a fun and inspiring resource for families, and – for many – the key to professional and business development. Your support makes that possible, which in turn creates life-changing stories like those you read here.

Thank you.



Friends President



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