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LA It's Happening Here
Scholarship Contest
March 2008

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The Lewiston Public Library:
A Community Niche

Along the bustling streets of downtown Lewiston, on the corner of Lisbon Street and Pine Street, stands a tall brick building with glass doors and cozy seating on the inside. Full of warm light during the frozen winter hours, the Lewiston Public Library (LPL) has evolved into more than just a storage place for books. When you step into its lobby, on the left you are greeted with the latest renowned best sellers and to your right you can browse through posted bulletins about Lewiston/Auburn upcoming events. In order for a community to truly be a community, it must connect people from all facets of its city. The Lewiston Public Library is a place for children, teens, and adults to come together for entertainment outside of their homes.

There are various programs and places in Lewiston and Auburn that are up and coming; the new housing development in the Lewiston downtown area, the Catholic Charities program, and Lots to Garden are all uprising initiatives that have helped Lewiston earn its title as an "All-American City." But for me, and for many youth my age, what is important about the area is being able to have a hip environment where we can relax. Lewiston and Auburn offers various shops and programs that citizens can get involved with—our sources of entertainment continue to expand with the 21st century. But the community has gone beyond just giving people a place to go to on the weekends. Consider this: the Lewiston Public Library is free of charge, centrally located, offers technology and books for use, and is *safe*! What better place for parents to bring their kids or teenagers to venture to after school?

Just this past December I went into LPL and asked for a meeting room that my English class could use during the holiday break to work on a class project. Twenty students from Lewiston High met in the Coulter Room for an afternoon to focus on educational studies. In this respect, LPL's facilities reach out to students directly, while simultaneously working with people

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from Bates, USM, and other schools. The Youth + Adult + Dialogue = Action (YADA) program is yet another example of the cohesiveness developing in the community between youth and adults. "It's happening here" is a slogan the community echoes and LPL embraces to this theme. Programs like YADA and the accessibility of space for students and adults to use enable people to meet and work on projects involved with the classroom and beyond. Additionally, the beautifully crafted Marsden Hartley Cultural Center and other halls host the arts and creativity that permeates Lewiston and Auburn citizens' inspiration. While LPL caters the scholastic and artistic world, there are stores and businesses just around the corner that bring prosperity to the downtown economics and consumer needs.

With the Internet services and "Teen Room" available six days a week to the young population of Lewiston and Auburn, LPL is one of the few places in which teens from all different backgrounds can stop by during free time and check e-mails, read magazines, or just chat with one another. It has been a challenge for the community to create functions in which the new Somali immigrants and the natives of the area can collaborate and get to know each other, but with open venues like the LPL, the city can begin to close the generational, ethnic, and other gaps that remain. I moved to Maine only six years ago and have found that the Lewiston Public Library is an emerging progressive spot with diverse groups of all backgrounds. One thing's for sure—we all want to check out a book!

The signature component of the Lewiston Public Library is what it promotes: reading. Today I sit at the computer or watch television too much and have found that the Lewiston Public Library is an interactive place full of resources and people I never would have met at school or a café. Society has fostered a sense of exclusion in a technological world, and in many ways this sentiment isn't amiss, but too often we forget the community that is outside of our homes. The Lewiston Public Library is more than just a building or a center; it symbolizes the positive aspects of the area L/A seeks to enhance. So the next time you're driving along Lisbon Street on your way to work or to the store, take just a minute to check out the LPL and see that "what's happening" there is what makes the L/A community proud of its heritage and growing diversity of life.