

# **SAULT STE. MARIE PUBLIC LIBRARY**



## **A STRATEGIC AGENDA**

**2003 - 2008**

**SAULT STE. MARIE PUBLIC LIBRARY BOARD  
SEPTEMBER 2003**

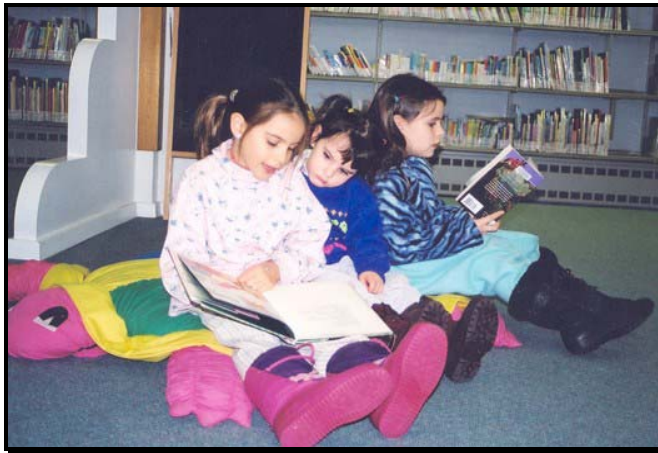
## Foreword

It is my pleasure to present the Sault Ste. Marie Public Library Strategic Agenda 2003-2008, which will provide a direction for library services for the next five years.

This strategic agenda is the culmination of two years of work, research and discussion by the trustees and staff of the Sault Ste. Marie Public Library. In that time a number of background studies, surveys, community meetings, focus groups and interviews were conducted to gather the information needed to develop this plan. I would like to thank all who gave of their time and offered their insights and ideas.

The next five years will be exciting ones for library services. We look forward to them with confidence, armed with the knowledge of the lasting value that a strong public library service provides.

Christopher Rous  
Chairman  
Sault Ste. Marie Public Library Board



I think the health of our civilization, the depth of our awareness about the underpinnings of our culture and our concern for the future can all be tested by how well we support our libraries. (Carl Sagan, Cosmos)

# Introduction

The environment in which the Sault Ste. Marie Public Library operates is constantly changing. Changes are coming so quickly that strategies to deal with them must be flexible and continuously evolving. With this in mind, the Sault Ste. Marie Public Library Board has prepared a strategic agenda rather than a traditional strategic plan.

This agenda is guided by the library's mission statement and by our fundamental beliefs. It is built on our understanding of changes in demographics, government, financial resources and technology; and is supported by research and statistics. It outlines broad directions that the library will pursue over the next five years and provides a framework for on-going planning.

Underlying this agenda is the value we place on the library patron, on our knowledgeable and motivated employees, and on the strong community support from individuals, groups and institutions.

The Strategic Agenda is divided into four sections:

**Where We've Come From** provides an overview of the Sault Ste. Marie Public Library, including its history, mission, strengths and services.

**Our Challenges** highlights the major demographic, economic, technological and governing forces which are driving the need for change.

**The Strategic Agenda for Library Development** outlines the direction which the library must pursue to respond to the challenges it faces.

**Getting Started** describes how we will begin to implement our strategic agenda.

If you have a garden and a library, you have everything you need. (Cicero, 106-45 BC)

# 1. Where we've come from

## A brief history of the Sault Ste. Marie Public Library

The Sault Ste. Marie Public Library was established in 1896 when the former Mechanics Institute passed a resolution to become the Sault Ste. Marie free Public Library. At that time the library was housed in two rooms in the town hall. Sault Ste. Marie then had a population of 3,186.

In 1903 the municipality constructed a public library building with the assistance of an Andrew Carnegie grant. The library was located in a municipal complex on Queen Street near the corner of East Street.

Destroyed by fire in 1907, the library was rebuilt in 1909. This building operated as the Main Library until 1966 when the present Centennial Library was opened. The building has undergone a number of renovations since its construction; the largest being a complete rethinking and redesign of internal space in 1993.

The first branch library opened in the west end (Steelton) in 1919 and was closed in 1992 following a review of branch services.

The 1960's marked an expansion of library services in Sault Ste. Marie. In addition to the construction of the Centennial Library, the Churchill Branch was opened in March 1966 and the Korah Branch in December 1967.

Library services have also kept up with the times. Children's services were introduced in the 1920's and further developed in the 1930s, partly as a response to the social needs brought on by the great depression. Films and audiovisual services first appeared in the 1940s and 1950s. Microfilm was introduced into library collections in the 1960s.

The 1990s saw changes to the physical plants of the library system. The Main Library was renovated, the Steelton Branch Library was closed and the Churchill Branch Library was expanded. This was also the decade in which the Sault Ste. Marie Public Library entered the automation era with the implementation of an integrated automated collection management system.

The late 1990s and the early years of the 21<sup>st</sup> century saw the library adapting its services to take advantage of the opportunities created by new information technologies such as the Internet.

Today the Sault Ste. Marie Public Library is one of the city's major service institutions with 41% of the community registered as library users. The library

lends over 640,000 items annually to the residents of Sault Ste. Marie and answers in excess of 60,000 requests for information. It employs 65 people and has an annual operating budget of 2.4 million dollars.



I always look forward to coming to the library. Once, when I couldn't get my parents to drive me here, I walked. It took an hour each way, but it was worth it. (Library's Homecoming Book, July 15, 1998)



## Mission Statement

The Sault Ste. Marie Public Library believes in the individual's right to access all expressions of knowledge, creativity, experience and intellectual activity.

To this end, the Sault Ste. Marie Public Library provides and promotes services and resources that meet individual and community needs for information, education, recreation and personal development.



Libraries are the spaces of lifelong learning.  
(Janice Gross Stein)

## Our Fundamental Beliefs

- **Universal Access:** We believe that the library is for everyone and that it must be accessible to everyone.
- **Intellectual Freedom:** We support the principle of Intellectual Freedom and are vigilant against any attempts at censorship. We do not pass judgment on the reading or informational needs of the individual.
- **Personal Enrichment:** The library provides the means for self-enrichment through recreational, cultural, informational and educational material and services which the individual can access by personal choice.
- **Preservation of the community's heritage:** We recognize our responsibility to collect and preserve the community's heritage.

## Our Strengths

### People:

- An autonomous Library Board of dedicated volunteers
- A knowledgeable, helpful and friendly staff committed to the library and to the community
- Dedicated volunteers
- An active Friends of the Library organization

### Facilities:

- Multiple locations that extend library service throughout the community
- A clean, comfortable, safe and non-threatening environment
- An accommodating place, responsive to individual needs

### Services:

- Library services, collections and programs that are responsive to individual and community needs
- Current library technology
- Long-standing focus on collecting and preserving our local history and archival sources



### Partnerships:

- Close integration of administrative functions with the municipality
- Effective cooperation between library staff and municipal staff
- Effective partnerships with individuals, agencies, groups and businesses

### Community:

- A positive image in, and support from, the community
- A library that is responsive to community needs

Without words, without writing and without books there would be no history, there could be no concept of humanity. (Herman Hesse, 1877-1962)

## **2. Our Challenges**

The Sault Ste. Marie Public Library, like many other libraries across Canada, is being challenged by change. Powerful forces are driving the need for us to rethink library services.

### **Tough Fiscal Constraints**

The Sault Ste. Marie Public Library is experiencing the tough reality of “doing more with less” as operating costs rise with inflationary increases while the library’s annual operating grant from the municipal and provincial governments remains flat-lined.

At the same time, the library’s opportunities for generating revenues are limited and fundraising is becoming more and more difficult.

### **Legislative Requirements**

The amount of federal and provincial government legislation that affects libraries is steadily increasing and becoming more complex.

### **Technology**

Technology is transforming the world of information providers, including libraries. It affects how information is created and how consumers request that information. The traditional print formats are increasingly being complemented, and in some cases even displaced, by the electronic formats.

### **Changing Community Demographics and a Declining Population Base**

Major demographic changes are affecting library services. An aging population, out-migration and changing family structures are all affecting our service requirements and service delivery.

### **Local Economy**

The local economy is changing from one that was traditionally reliant on a few primary industries (steel production/forestry/manufacturing) to one that is more diversified, less reliant on a few large employers and more reliant on the education, health and service sectors (tourism/call centers/casino).

Also, the residents of Sault Ste. Marie are experiencing a higher than average unemployment rate and a lower earning potential than in the past.

## **Services**

Service providers are facing rising expectations in service delivery. Patrons want fast and convenient service delivered with a high degree of excellence in customer service.

The demand both for new and traditional library services is increasing. Staffing levels and operating budgets, however, are not keeping pace with the increase in demand.

New information technologies represent both an opportunity and a challenge.

Taxpayers deserve good value for their money and want assurances that their investment is not being wasted.

## **Aging Buildings**

The Main Library was built in 1966 and the Korah Branch library in 1958. Both facilities are over 35 years old and present the challenges normally associated with aging infrastructure, including such issues as accessibility, annual maintenance costs and major capital improvements.

## **Creating Awareness of the Library**

Library research shows that the community is not aware of the broad range of services that the library provides. There is a need to inform the community of the role of the library and how library services can be relevant to individual lives and to the community as a whole.

## **Succession Planning**

The average age of the Sault Ste. Marie Public Library employee in 2003 is 48 years, while the median age is 50. The library will experience a significant turnover of staff within the next 5 to 10 years as the employees born into the "baby-boom" generation reach their retirement age. Issues such as knowledge management transfer, development of core competencies, employee recruitment and staff development all need to be addressed.

### 3. A Strategic Agenda for Library Development

#### Preamble:

It is the mission of the Sault Ste. Marie Public Library to provide and promote services and resources that meet individual and community needs for information, education, recreation and personal development.

This will be achieved by pursuing strategic directions in four key areas:

- the **people** we serve
- the **services** we provide
- the **people who provide** the services
- the Sault Ste. Marie Public Library as an **organization**

#### 1 - The People We Serve:

***Goal: The Sault Ste. Marie Public Library will understand and respond to the library needs of our patrons.***

To achieve this goal the Sault Ste. Marie Public Library will pursue strategies in the following areas:

1. Understanding changing library needs through:
  - 1.1. Market research
  - 1.2. Consultation with our community
  - 1.3. Patron feedback
  - 1.4. Staff input
2. Identifying library services which meet the needs of our diverse clientele through:
  - 2.1. Market research
  - 2.2. Consultation with our community
  - 2.3. Patron feedback
  - 2.4. Staff input

## **2 - The Services We Provide:**

***Goal: The Sault Ste. Marie Public Library will provide effective and convenient access to high-quality modern library services.***

To achieve this goal the Sault Ste. Marie Public Library will pursue strategies in the following areas:

1. Continuing valued traditional library services by:
  - 1.1. Providing a broad range of library materials and services
  - 1.2. Focusing on services which promote life-long reading
  - 1.3. Preserving our community's heritage
2. Keeping current with technological developments by:
  - 2.1. Introducing new technologies and services when economically feasible
3. Improving library services by:
  - 3.1. Evaluating and prioritizing our services
  - 3.2. Developing new services to meet individual and community needs
4. Improving access and convenience by:
  - 4.1. Improving access to library locations through special equipment, technology and physical renovations
  - 4.2. Exploring and developing other effective methods of delivering library services
  - 4.3. Exploring and introducing library technology that improves access and convenience
  - 4.4. Developing policies, services and programs that assist patrons in using the library
5. Redefining how we serve our patrons by:
  - 5.1. Developing strategic partnerships with other institutions, groups or organizations
  - 5.2. Developing more self-serve approaches to library use

### **3 - The People Who Provide The Services - The Staff and the Trustees:**

**Staff Goal: The employees of the Sault Ste. Marie Public Library will continue to develop their skills and knowledge to provide high-quality library service that meets the needs of our patrons.**

To achieve this goal the Sault Ste. Marie Public Library will pursue strategies in the following areas:

1. Provide the necessary tools and training to:
  - 1.1. Enable staff to perform their jobs efficiently and effectively
  - 1.2. Support the ongoing development of job skills
  - 1.3. Enable staff to respond effectively to library patrons
  - 1.4. Understand the impact of emerging technologies and implement them as required
2. Provide a safe and healthy workplace
  - 2.1. With the necessary tools, policies and procedures
  - 2.2. Through building design and security systems
  - 2.3. By recognizing and being responsive to the needs of staff
3. Redefining job functions
  - 3.1. To enable more flexibility and to reflect the impact of changing technologies and shifts in library service priorities
  - 3.2. Place more emphasis on critical job functions such as planning, analysis, evaluation, and problem solving

**Trustee Goal: The Trustees of the Sault Ste. Marie Public Library will continue to develop their ability and skills to govern wisely and to understand the library needs of the community.**

To achieve this goal the Sault Ste. Marie Public Library will pursue strategies in the following areas:

1. Continuing to develop the necessary skills to govern effectively by:
  - 1.1. Ensuring Board membership in relevant library associations
  - 1.2. Keeping current on issues affecting libraries

2. Ensuring effective, efficient and responsive public library service for the citizens of Sault Ste. Marie by:
  - 2.1. Establishing policies and procedures to receive the information necessary for effective library governance
3. Ensuring adequate funding and support of library services by:
  - 3.1. Lobbying for library needs
  - 3.2. Advocating for library services
4. Preserving the autonomy of library services and of the Library Board to ensure effective library services for the citizens of Sault Ste. Marie

#### **4 - The Sault Ste. Marie Public Library as an Organization:**

***Goal: The Sault Ste. Marie Public Library will be an accountable, responsive organization recognized for high-quality service, effective management and strong community involvement.***

To achieve this goal the Sault Ste. Marie Public Library will pursue strategies in the following areas:

1. Accountability to the City of Sault Ste. Marie by:
  - 1.1. Giving priority to serving the citizens of Sault Ste. Marie
  - 1.2. Working cooperatively with the City of Sault Ste. Marie Council and City staff
  - 1.3. Supporting the goals and initiatives of the City of Sault Ste. Marie Council where applicable
  - 1.4. Providing the best possible services for the investment made in local library service
2. Providing quality library service by:
  - 2.1. Establishing annual service priorities
  - 2.2. Continuing to improve efficiency and effectiveness by continuous review and innovation in all operations

3. Strengthening our capacity for analysis and planning by:
  - 3.1. Monitoring and evaluating services and trends to respond to changing demands
  - 3.2. Implementing new systems, market research and patron feedback to support an understanding of needs, priorities and services
4. Improving our visibility in the community and our relevancy to individuals and to the community by:
  - 4.1. Improving our marketing and communications
  - 4.2. Raising public awareness of the Library and its services
  - 4.3. Ensuring that the Library presents a positive and professional image
5. Building mutually beneficial relationships by:
  - 5.1. Exploring cooperative ventures with public and private sector partners
6. Developing and maintaining sources of revenue to ensure a high-quality and effective library service by:
  - 6.1. Reviewing service charges annually
  - 6.2. Developing new sources of revenue through activities such as merchandising, fundraising, sponsorships and advertising
  - 6.3. Assisting and supporting the Friends of the Library organization

## **4. Getting Started**

The Sault Ste. Marie Public Library Board and Staff will annually set achievable goals based on the Strategic Agenda.

These annual goals will be designed to assist in achieving the library's mission of "providing and promoting services that meet individual and community needs for information, education, recreation and personal development".

This Strategic Agenda is a step toward achieving the Library's vision of the future. The Board, staff, friends and community must now work together to realize this future.