

# Thrift Tip: Public Libraries are Thrifty

Philadelphia Profile in Thrift: [Free Library of Philadelphia](#)

“We are here to provide FREE access to knowledge for all; we are a FREE public space open to all; we encourage the FREE exchange of ideas; we are inextricably linked to the city where FREEdom was born.”  
—Siobhan A. Reardon, President and Director of the Free Library of Philadelphia

**Thrift Tip of the Day:** [Start a Thrift Club at your local library.](#)

## Fast Facts

- Almost all Philadelphia homes are no more than one mile from a Free Library
- In one study, 23 percent of survey respondents reported that they either could not have learned to read without the Free Library or that they helped someone else to read and could not have done it without the Free Library

## The New Thrift Goes Democratic Why Public Libraries Are Thrifty

Step inside the Parkway Central branch of the Free Library of Philadelphia, and you feel as if you're in a palace—stately pillars, arched doorways, high ceilings. Yet, the library is not aristocratic, but democratic. Libraries promote “thrift of knowledge” because they make knowledge accessible to all.

## Learn More about the Free Public Library

### How do you use the library?

[Jamie, a lifelong Philly resident who always sports a Phillies cap]: “It's a good library . . . I come here daily to get my spirit together and keep off the streets. Do all the right stuff, if you know what I mean.”

[Natalia, an Americorps volunteer and aspiring international diplomat]: “It's really awesome that I can learn French for free via the public library.”

[Joe, a homeless man who is trying to get back on his feet]: “Whether it's politics or religion, I like to read old books with old ideas. It helps me validate what I believe about things and understand why I do what I do. I've also been checking out some resources to learn to exercise and to take care of my body.”

## An interview with Sandra Horrocks, Vice President, External Affairs

**What services does the Free Library provide?**

“Each library tries to reflect the community that it's located in. Every library is there to give everybody free access to information, free access to books, DVD's, and CD's, and of course free internet access. In Philadelphia 46 percent of our households have no internet access. It's much higher than the national average which is about 27 percent.”

**How does each branch reflect the community?**

“The head of each branch library understands the community and who the population is in that community. The Independence branch, which is just south of Chinatown, does an enormous amount of work with Chinese American individuals. In addition to ESL classes, they offer citizenship classes. In Southwest Philadelphia there is a very high unemployment rate. It's about 16 percent. That particular branch has an area just for job seekers, where they can go in and learn to write a resume, do online job searches, and take courses to prepare for an interview.”

**Any other services the library provides?**

“[E]ach branch has a meeting room. Community organizations, knitting clubs—anybody can come and use the meeting room in the library. It has really become a community center in addition to a location for free access to information.”

**We saw that in the past you've done job fairs?**

“Yes, we've done entry level job fairs, and in the past thousands of people have come. We had the Fels Institute of Government at Penn do [a return on investment study](#) for us, and in the course of a year more than a thousand people got jobs only because of the library.”

**Have you seen the recession affect the number of people that use the library?**

“Yes, we have had dramatic increases. Our business is booming, but our income is shrinking. In times of recession libraries are used more than ever, but in times of recession library budgets are also cut. So we don't gain anything from our business booming, unlike for-profit organizations that have fee for service. But we're here to serve people with free services—that's what we're here for.”

Information courtesy of [www.newthrift.org](http://www.newthrift.org)