
Richland Center an Information Destination

Appeared in the Tri-City Herald May 27, 2001

Blending into its muted desert surroundings near the Columbia River, the Consolidated Information Center in north Richland can be easy to miss. But for hundreds of people each year, it's an information destination.

Many of those walking through the Center's glass-topped atrium entryway are students attending Washington State University or Hanford employees seeking library information. But the Center also makes thousands of books, journals, microfiche reports and online resources available to the public, including commercial businesses and entrepreneurs.

The Center is a two-story, architecturally striking structure on the north end of the WSU Tri-Cities campus. The 70,000-square-foot building opened in 1997 with funding from the state of Washington and the Department of Energy.

The building houses classrooms, offices, meeting rooms and exhibit space, but it's the information-related repositories and services that are of particular interest to local businesses. The Hanford Technical Library, the WSU Tri-Cities Max Benitz Library and the Business Information Center are loaded with a variety of information that can help emerging and established firms.

The HANFORD TECHNICAL LIBRARY offers more than 1,000 journals in hard copy or in library-purchased electronic formats, according to information specialist Nancy Doran. It also houses books and an extensive collection of reference materials. Most of the publications are scientific or technical, featuring topics such as metals, engineering, physics and chemistry.

The Hanford Technical Library was created to support the Pacific Northwest National Laboratory and the Hanford site, so there are some restrictions on use by others. But anyone can use materials at the library and photocopy them there. People also can find titles in the electronic databases and request them at their local public libraries through inter-library loans. Users can conduct their own patent and trademark searches on computers using publicly available databases on the Web.

"The materials we carry are valuable for many of the area's technology-related companies, such as manufacturing and engineering firms," Doran said. For non-Hanford small businesses that need frequent use, the Technical Library offers corporate accounts for a monthly subscription fee of \$77. This entitles ten staff at the company to check out materials and, for additional fees, get interlibrary loans, literature searches or patent searches. About 20 Tri-Cities companies have this arrangement now, Doran said.

One of these is MesoSystems Technology, a Kennewick firm that manufactures biological monitoring and control systems. "Our engineers spend considerable time reviewing scientific literature at the Hanford Technical Library to see what's been

done in specific areas of research,” said Sherry Liikala, MesoSystems marketing director. “This helps us build on current technology to develop our products.”

The WSU LIBRARY, in contrast, operates more like a public library. Any adult can check out WSU-labeled materials on site using a free library card. The WSU library carries about 2,500 journals in electronic or hard copy as well as books, videos and reference materials.

“Our materials are selected to support WSU degree programs, so they include everything from business to education to science and tech topics,” said Joe Judy, WSU’s director of information and facility services.

One of the most popular resources is the business database called ProQuest. It covers over 1,400 electronic journals and industry trade publications, many of which are available in full text, Judy said.

Community users can subscribe as members of the Friends of the Library. For a \$100 annual fee per individual or company, WSU librarians will borrow materials from any of the WSU libraries in the state, giving users access to hundreds of thousands more materials.

The BUSINESS INFORMATION CENTER, part of WSU Business LINKS, is dedicated solely to business topics. The federal Small Business Administration established these centers nationwide in the 1990s as a way to help small companies become more successful.

The Business Information Center in Richland has acquired 1,200 books, magazines, videos and other materials since 1995, according to manager Susan Sande. Typical subjects are entrepreneurship, marketing and financial systems. With a free WSU library card, anyone can check out the non-reference materials in the collection. As with the other libraries, all information can be read and photocopied on site. Materials in the Business Information Center tend to be practical and advice-oriented.

Perhaps the most highly sought-after reference materials, Sande said, are the 60 handbooks published by Entrepreneur magazine, each focused on how to start a particular type of business. Also popular are the 36 trade magazines, industry reports and manufacturing directories. The Center also has some Spanish-language business books.

Three computers at the Business Information Center are loaded with business software, including programs to create business and marketing plans, financial projections, employee manuals and loan documentation. “The computers are for people who want to try out the software, who need to do a particular kind of business research or who don’t have a computer of their own,” Sande said.

Sande can search the Center’s collection to find and recommend materials on specific business topics or industries. For more personalized, hands-on business

counseling, Sande refers people to other staff at WSU Business LINKS and to other local resources.

Materials from all three libraries are shelved together but labeled separately. Staff can help people search for materials or get started on one of the 17 computers. For more information about the Consolidated Information Center, including operating hours, directions and people to contact, see <http://www.tricity.wsu.edu/ConsolidatedInformationCenter.html>. Or, call 372-7430 for the Hanford and WSU libraries or 372-7621 for the Business Information Center.