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Teens and Libraries

A fourteen year-old boy was heard to say, in response to a question about his reading habits, "I don't like to read." At intervals over the next minute or so, in an otherwise slow-to-respond quietude, he, for whatever reason, repeated that sentiment twice. He had not been asked again. He seemed to need to put an exclamation point on the answer. He certainly did so by adding finally, "It's summertime."

In his ghostwritten book "Spare" (2022), Prince Harry, Duke of Essex, says to his eventual wife-to-be, Meghan Markle, "not really big on books." Another prince.

I do not profess to know why the boy is of this mind. It is not my area of expertise. I have been told that he is a good student at school. He is said to be particularly good in mathematics classes, and he professes a high interest in certain engineering matters, most notably roller coasters. He loves to visit amusement parks like Kennywood to experience them; maybe that is all there is to it, just the joy of the ride and nothing to do with engineering. He has visited many. I am cynical about such things.

I don't know if he reads about roller coaster technology. He certainly can read, as he also spends a lot of time playing games on his cell phone, and at Internet sites specializing in the statistics of sports. Maybe this is just the way of today's fourteen year-old world, but I am of a mind about another way this can be. And this other way can be free to his family, without the dollar and energy cost of all those trips to amusement parks. Of course, I am speaking about Libraries.

Delmont Public Library has a "green" building and a "green" mentality to go with that for some of its present programming, and also its intended programming. One of now retired Director Denni Grassel's intents was to install a solar collector, or two, at ground level, so as to create a hands-on learning space as complement to its signature, fossil fuel-saving rooftop solar capacity. The ground-level installation would include dedicated readout capacity of solar energy collection as it is occurring, as a function of solar inclination and weather for example. An added feature is that the setup would be a monitoring station for solar eclipses too. It would be a readily available place to experience "green" physics, "green" engineering, and even astronomy at times.

The ground-level solar collector was not within the scope of the original construction that led to opening the new "green" Delmont Public Library in 2021, and it is currently not an active effort since Denni's retirement and other circumstances. The dedicated solar equipment-to-be had been meant to more purposefully draw in young students with an interest in science and technology. The intended project is, however, already supported by a specially purchased solar book collection, assembled for just the purpose of making reading integral with the science and engineering experience that is already of the rooftop solar design of this Library. And what could be more relevant in today's climate-challenged world than getting kids to experience the use of solar energy in a more hands-on, practical way?

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Could the fourteen-year-old of this story be drawn to reading as a lifetime activity if he had access to something like this at his public Library, which he actually does not? I honestly do not know the answer to that. But, I am very sure that some kid(s) will, and also that this is a very creative approach to serving as a modern Library.

Charles B. Greenberg
Board Director, Murrysville Community Library Foundation