

**Published in the Penn-Franklin News August 19, 2020: “The Magic Library Card!”**

## **Power Library Empowers for Science Fairs and More**

*Power Library (<https://powerlibrary.org>) is a vast, informed on-line resource for information ranging from everyday needs, such as “Auto & Small Engine Repair” and “College Resources,” to scholarly subjects. It is made possible and accessible in part by Library Services and Technology Act (LSTA) funds from the U.S. Institute of Museum and Library Services, and through the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania’s Library Access funds administered by the Pennsylvania Department of Education, Office of Commonwealth Libraries.*



Power Library can be accessed with your “Magic Library Card” at any Westmoreland Library Network™ (WLN) member library web site, including at the site of Murrysville Community Library. At WLN’s own site, under Events and Programs, you will find the direct link (<https://www.wlnonline.org/prsef/>) to information about Power Library meant specifically for students who are participating in regional science fairs, including the granddaddy, the Pittsburgh Regional Science & Engineering Fair (PRSEF).

PRSEF, with its typically 1000+ 6<sup>th</sup> through 12<sup>th</sup>-grade participants, is entering its 82<sup>nd</sup> year. It is managed by the Carnegie Science Center, with help from hundreds of local, qualified STEM project reviewers and judges from universities and industries. This writer is on the Carnegie’s Science Review Committee, and is category co-chair and judge for Senior Chemistry.

The PRSEF link to Power Library resources for STEM students at the WLN web site is made possible by the great work of Dana Farabaugh, WLN’s District Consultant, and Emma Beaver, Murrysville Community Library’s previous Library Director. A printed flyer version of the information that is on the link was made possible by a generous gift from the Lulu A. Pool Health and Education Trust, which is overseen by First Commonwealth Bank. Thank you all!

Participants in the PRSEF are required to submit at least five informed bibliographic resources with the required application to participate. The Science Review Committee mentioned above oversees compliance with standards and quality of the bibliography.

The vast majority of these young people, not unlike many adults, do not know how to either identify informed reference sources or to prepare an informed and properly formatted bibliography. This reflects a serious problem in American society generally, especially as it relates to use of the Internet and understanding of the scientific method

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and its reasoning process. This matter is obviously also a foundational problem for youngsters first learning how to conduct a research project.

An informed reference cites a source that has been written within the bounds of professional standards, and, in scholarly circles, includes reviews before publication by at least two credentialed individuals who are fully trained and conversant in the field.

Power Library is a great single resource to steer the young STEM researcher to informed resources, especially because it encompasses such a comprehensive collection on a broad number of student interests. This is so even though the two-reviewer rule does not necessarily apply to all Power Library subject collections.

For that reason, the Pittsburgh Regional Science & Engineering Fair and the WLN entered into a collaboration earlier this year to direct student Fair participants to the WLN web site. The PRSEF is now also handing out the printed flyer to student-sponsoring teachers for the coming 2021 Fair (much earlier in the Fair cycle than was possible for 2020), in the Fair project inception stage. At the same time, the flyer is being distributed through the Franklin Regional School District, at Murrysville Community Library, and at Greensburg/Hempfield Area Library.

Power Library is indeed a powerful library tool, and it comes to you free with your WLN library card, even in a time of COVID-19.

You may have thought that your local public library, your Murrysville Community Library, must be crippled by the COVID-19 crisis. Not so! Years ago we adapted and migrated to an online WLN countywide catalogue, the Polaris Integrated Library System that I described in a previous article. We upgrade regularly. We are able to adapt quickly now and continue to serve the community, with renewed emphasis on virtual resources. That includes this easy and focused access to Power Library for Fair participants. Please send your kids there.

We'll be telling you some more in the coming weeks.

Charles B. Greenberg,  
WLN Board President