

Alice Woods Branch Library at Ash Creek School: A Brief History



The Sunizona Branch of the Cochise County Library District has been located at Ash Creek School since the winter of 1979-80. Before that, the branch was located in one room of the community building of the Whelan [Willen] Corp., at the junction of 666 (191) and 181. Mabel McCoy was the volunteer librarian during much of the 1970s, and she and the Cochise County Librarian Helen Maul negotiated the arrangement to house the branch at the school when the branch was asked to vacate the Whalen [Willen] Building.

The original contract between the School District and Cochise County was signed by both parties in April, 1980. The School District agreed to provide a portion of its school buildings for a branch library, and Cochise County agreed to provide a branch collection and to supervise and assist the volunteers who would make it possible for the branch to be open to the public.

Mabel McCoy retired shortly after the branch moved to Ash Creek School. For a short while, Mary Alice Jones was the Head Volunteer. In the early 1980s, Mary Ann Cornish took over the daily operation of the branch, and she continued until Alice Woods became the Branch Coordinator in the spring of 1986.

From the very first, the operation was a joint one. The reference and children's collection of the school library and the county branch library were interfiled on the shelves. The county also provided books for the adults in the community, along with extra shelving, a children's table and chairs, paperback racks, a typewriter, book trucks, and other equipment and supplies that supplemented what the school provided.

Mrs. Woods served as both the School Librarian and the Branch Coordinator until ill health forced her to retire in the summer of 1994. She passed away on November 21, 1994. In recognition of the contribution she made to the community, both the Ash Creek School Board and the Cochise County Board of Supervisors officially named the library for her. The library moved in February, 1995 to the newly renovated original schoolhouse/auditorium on the Ash Creek campus, and will continue to operate as a joint school/public library under the direction of Martha Lester.

Donna Gaab, Cochise County Librarian, April 1995

There have been many changes at the library since 1995, but it is still the centerpiece of the Ash Creek School campus, housed in the original one-room schoolhouse built in 1910.

The library still functions as a joint school and public library. The school provides and maintains the facility and a portion of the book collection, and the Cochise County Library District now supplies a full range of library materials for both county patrons and Ash Creek students and staff to use.

Since 1997, the Library District has also provided library management software that keeps track of books and materials, and access to a shared library catalog that includes all twelve public libraries in Cochise County. School and public library patrons may request materials from any location for checkout in Sunizona, and requested items are delivered twice each week by the library courier service.

School and public library patrons also have access to a large collection of ebooks, downloadable audiobooks, and digital magazines, which are available 24/7. In 2020, the library added dedicated digital reading rooms for children and teens, and partnered with ten other Arizona library systems so that Cochise County readers also have access to their digital collections.

The Library District also provides public computers and internet access. Internet service was upgraded to 100 Mbps broadband in 2018, and fast, free wi-fi is available from 6 am to 8 pm daily.

The longstanding partnership between Ash Creek School and the Library District is mutually beneficial. Ash Creek students have access to materials and services offered through the public library, and the community of Sunizona has a public library branch housed in an attractive, historic, yet fully modern facility.

The library's Branch Manager is April Alvarez (aalvarez@cochise.az.gov). The school librarian is Marian Baker-Gierlach, who previously served as Branch Manager from 2001-2021.

As of March 2025, public library hours in Sunizona are:

Thursday 9:30 am – 4:30 pm

Wednesday 9:30 am – 2:30 pm

Saturday 9:30 am – 12:30 pm

Amadee Ricketts, Cochise County Librarian, March 2025