Nation's First Bookless Public Library Could Be in Texas

Mashable

Bexar County, Texas, has unveiled plans for what could become the nation's first bookless public library.

The initiative is being pushed forward by County Judge Nelson W. Wolff, who told *The San Antonio Express News* [1] that he was inspired to develop a bookless library after reading Walter Isaacson's authorized biography [2] of late Apple co-founder Steve Jobs. Wolff, whose own personal library contains more than 1,000 printed and bound first editions, believes future generations will have little use for hardcover or paperback volumes.

The library system, dubbed BiblioTech, proposes to make thousands of e-books available for county residents both online and at a 5,000-square-foot physical location on the South Side of the county, according to a statement issued by Bexar County officials. Visitors would be able to check out books to read on their own e-readers or tablets, or borrow one of the library's 150 take-home e-readers.

"If you want to get an idea what it looks like, go into an Apple store," Wolff said.

Several universities have already gone bookless, including the University of Texas at San Antonio, which is also situated in Bexar County, as well as Stanford University's engineering school. The concept has thus far failed to take root in city and county-wide institutions, however. In 2002, a small library branch offering only e-books opened in Pima County, Arizona, but began stocking printed books a few years later in response to community demand. In early 2011, a highly publicized proposal [3] to replace a budget-strapped branch of a public library in Newport Beach, Calif., was dismissed [4] following public outcry.

Unlike the Newport Beach branch, which houses more than 30,000 books, Bexar County has no print legacy to contend with. The county currently lacks a public

library system, instead paying $3.7 million per year to San Antonio city for access to its library, according to *The San Antonio Express News*. Given the growing affordability of e-readers as well as current book-buying trends — e-book sales surpassed hardcover sales [5] in the U.S. for the first time in June, according to the Association of American Publishers — a bookless library makes a good deal of sense in the year 2013.

The proposal has been met with early enthusiasm [6] from the community. Wolff hasn't yet outlined the budget for the project and acknowledges that private donations will be needed to get it off the ground.

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