



BRIDGE

A HAVEN FOR INNOVATORS, ENTREPRENEURS

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ALBION — A couple of decades ago, your average library was today's version of an internet search engine — a place to go to access information you couldn't find at your home.

Today? At least at the Noble County Public Library, it's a place where entrepreneurs are born.

The library's central branch in Albion is home to a maker space called the Bridge, where patrons are encouraged to experiment with the latest in technology. Since starting the program in 2015-16, the library has invested approximately \$50,000 for equipment which includes a 3-D printer, a glow forge — a laser cutter and engraver — a CNC machining tool, poster printer and a heat press.

"We wanted technology to be available," NCPL Executive Director Sandy Petrie said. "To have people try new things, to experiment."

Some of those patrons have turned the Bridge's offerings into their own businesses, finding their ideas and creativity have a place in the marketplace.

"That's how entrepreneurs are born," Petrie said. "They can turn that into a business. We have found our niche in growing entrepreneurs."

The Bridge has been so successful, the library swapped spaces with its teen area in June of 2022. The new room for the innovation station is approximately 50% larger.

Along with hobbyists and entrepreneurs, local businesses and even government entities have utilized it for projects.

Interested people can check out what's available by making an appointment with one of the two area gurus, Derrick Leatherman and Austin Smith, or by just browsing during open hours.

Leatherman and Smith are on hand to show patrons how the various machines work and what they are capable of.

"We don't do anything for people," Petrie said. "This is a learning, education environment."

Once a patron has become certified on one of the machines, including displaying a proficiency in all safety procedure, they can use the machine on their own.

Leatherman said it is a common experience for one patron to assist another in the Bridge.

Albion Town Manager Jacob Ihrle thinks so much of the Bridge that he invited Leatherman and Smith to make a presentation during a recent Albion Town Council meeting, citing the exciting possibilities the innovative area has to offer.

"The Noble County Public Library has led the effort," Ihrle told the council. "I don't think it's a resource that is utilized enough."

In their presentation, Smith and Leatherman highlighted the various capabilities of the Bridge. Leatherman also pointed out that the only cost to patrons is for materials.

"Usually it's very cost-effective and we try to keep it that way," Leatherman told the council.

People from DeKalb County, Shippshewana and Fort Wayne have made the trip to Albion to use the Bridge.

"It's a resource the library offers for everybody," Leatherman said in his presentation. "We've added some things as our patrons' needs have changed."

HOW IT STARTED

The library maker space idea has been around since 2010 or so.

Some libraries have used the concept to create craft areas.

"The maker movement in libraries is about teaching our patrons to think for themselves, to think creatively, and to look for do-it-yourself solutions," according to the American Library Association's website.

When the central branch went through extensive renovations in 2015-2016, architects originally designed a maker space to be located in a far corner of the building. Petrie had them change the plans.

"I wanted it front and center," Petrie said. "I wanted it to be visible. I think it helped us."

The maker space was put into an enclosed room directly across from the front desk, where patrons couldn't help but see it.

A bigger decision was what to put into it.

When the NCPL system discussed the idea, it wanted it to be more than simple craft area.

"We knew we wanted to do something, but we wanted to do something different," Petrie said. "We wanted technology to be available. To have people try new things, to experiment."

REASON FOR SUCCESS

Along with Petrie's leadership, the Bridge has taken

off for a couple of main reasons.

For one, Petrie picked Derrick Leatherman, the system's IT director, to lead the project.

"I really let Derrick just take it," Petrie said.

And that didn't mean she wanted Leatherman to carry out her vision. She gave Leatherman plenty of autonomy, something she does with all of her staff.

"I don't put boundaries on them," Petrie said.

Leatherman flourished in his new role under that kind of autonomy.

"When you're not micromanaged, your creativity can just go wild," Leatherman said. "You can dream."

Another key factor has been the support and encourage from the Noble County Public Library's Board of Trustees.

"I have a board that is incredibly forward thinking," Petrie said. "The board is very supportive of being a benchmark for other communities, other libraries."

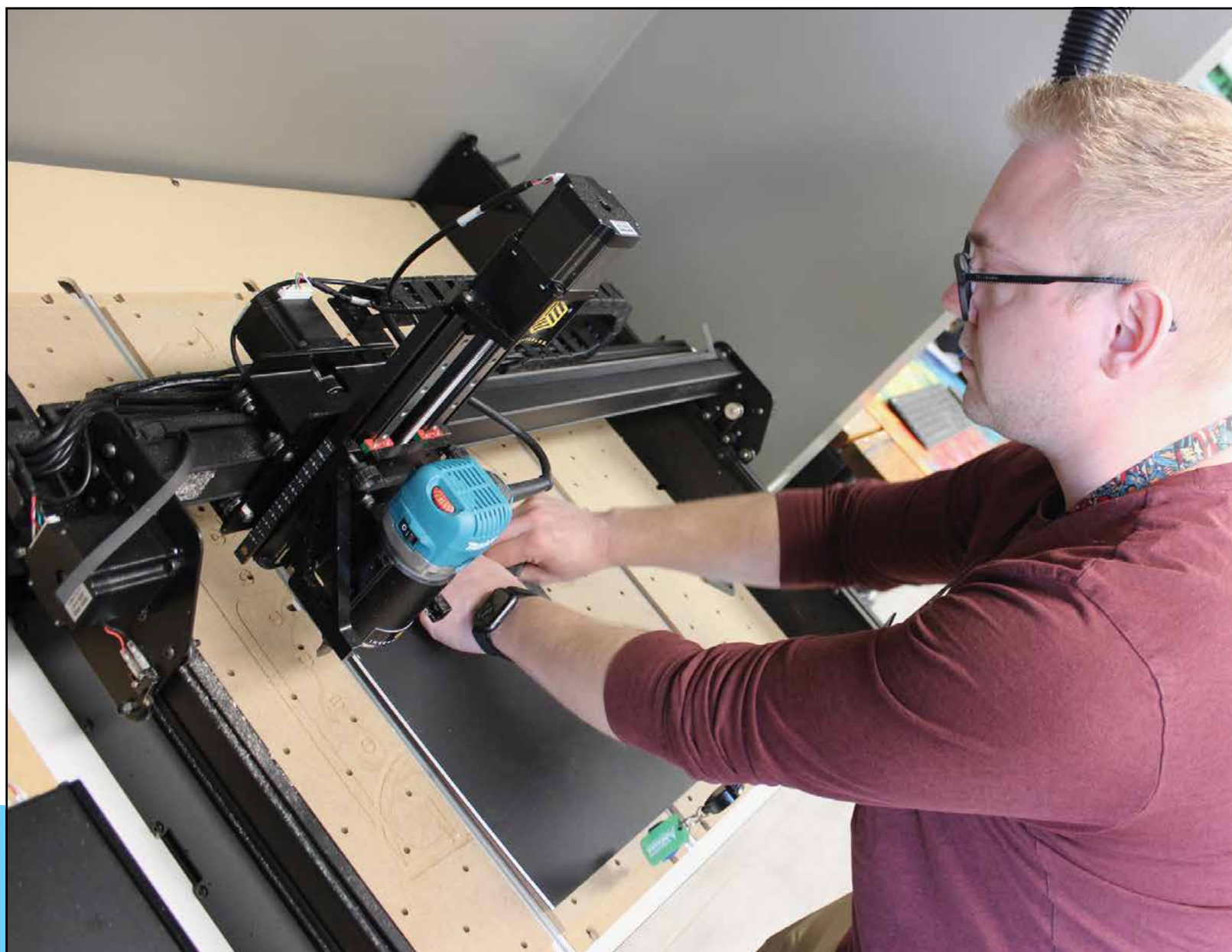
Offerings at the Bridge, with information provided by the library:

POSTER PRINTER/PLOTTER PRINTER

High quality large format banners, art prints, and wall decals.

The Bridge has a variety of materials including regular paper (similar to regular copy paper), heavyweight paper (similar to a lightweight cardstock), glossy and satin photo paper, glossy and matte adhesive vinyl for wall decals, thin rip-resistant and waterproof banner vinyl, and canvas (canvas can be stretched over canvas frames, but that's something that patrons can do at home)

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Library Bridge instructor Derrick Leatherman sets up one of the many Makerspace options in the Bridge at the library's central branch in Albion.



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GLOWFORGE LASER

This one and the X-Carve are better to just describe what they do than examples of what they make. The Glowforge can cut and engrave with a laser on a range of different materials. These include but are not limited to acrylic, woods, leather and wood veneer material all of which are typically available in The Bridge.

X-CARVE CNC

The X-Carve is a CNC router capable of cutting and carving materials much thicker and larger than the Glowforge. It's also able to handle materials that are unsafe to cut with a laser. This machine is great for cutting parts for later assembly or carving text into plaques but for best results, it's easier to do cutting and carving before having a finished project.

SILHOUETTE CAMEO

Used for cutting adhesive or heat transfer vinyl, cardstock, paper, and more for use as stickers, stencils, fabric transfers, cards, and materials for other crafts.

The Cameo is similar to a Cricut, but the silhouette studio software offers an abundance of great tools for designing cut paths and print and cut designs. We also use the silhouette studio software to design .svg files for use in the Glowforge and X-Carve.

HEAT PRESS/SUBLIMATION

The Bridge offers a printer loaded with sublimation ink and special sublimation paper for transferring ink onto t-shirts and other fabric materials (must be polyester or a high percentage polyester blend), as well as other sublimation blanks. The library does not currently supply any sublimation blanks. Blanks can be found on Amazon or some blanks such as mugs can be found at Walmart. Cricut sublimation blanks do work with the inks and printers. There are many different blanks available but some of the most popular we see are mugs, phone cases, metal tumblers and bookmarks.

The Bridge also has a heat press available with attachments for large and small mugs, plates and hats.

FORM 2 3D PRINTER

The Form 2 can print 3D objects from a tank of liquid resin. These prints can be designed using CAD software or found on online 3D file repositories such as Pinshape or Thingiverse. The Form 2 is capable of printing very high quality objects perfect for detailed small objects or prototyping a nearly ready part, but it is much slower and is typically more expensive than the Bridge's other 3D printer the MakerBot.

MAKERBOT 3D PRINTER

The MakerBot is also a 3D printer but uses a plastic filament that is melted and extruded to build 3D parts. Similarly to the Form 2 parts can be designed using CAD software or found in the same 3D repositories. Parts printed in the MakerBot are very nice quality but are not the near finish quality from the Form 2. This printer is faster and cheaper than the Form 2 making it great for early prototyping or simple parts that don't have a lot of detail.



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