

Desert Hot Springs and Its Library

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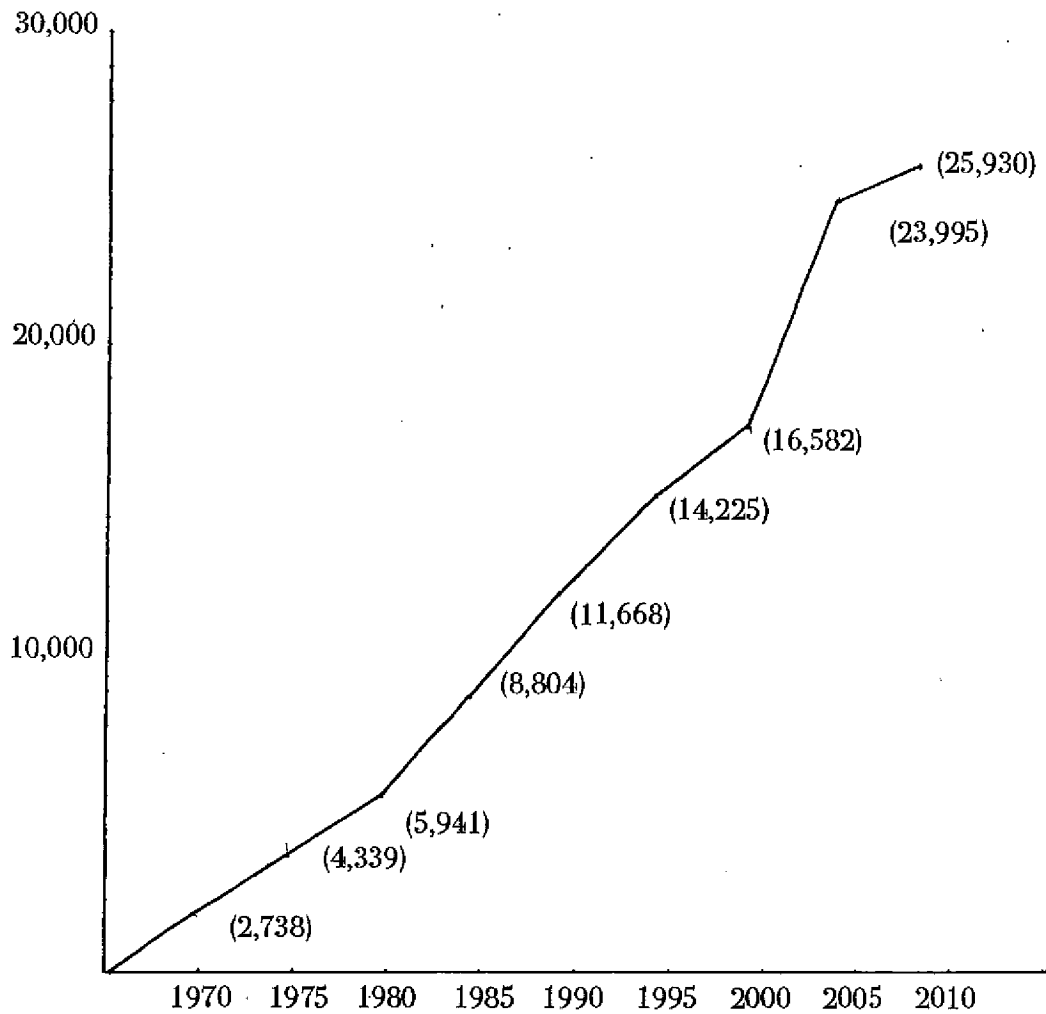
The town of Desert Hot Springs began as the dream of its founder, L. W. Coffee. He was drawn to the area in 1933 by the hot mineral waters discovered in 1913 by Cabot Yerxa, one of Desert Hot Springs' earliest homesteaders. Mr. Coffee became convinced that the area could be developed as a world class health spa. He envisioned an affordable destination for those seeking the health benefits of hot mineral water, and in 1941 he Opened Coffee's Bath House. Other spa hotels followed, and over the years the town's population swelled during the winter season with tourists from Canada as well as the north-east and mid-west sections of the United States. Desert Hot Springs also became an attractive destination during these early years for middle class retirees.

Through the efforts of Ms. Doris Price Rowlands, the first county supported library opened in 1945 in a space shared with Ms. J. Marie Ropp's Little Art Gallery on Palm Avenue. It moved to the town's movie theater building in 1951. Then in 1956, the Desert Hot Springs Chapter of the Rotary Club took on the project of erecting a new library building. They raised money to purchase property on Pierson Street, and volunteers showed up with hammers, saws, and tool belts to build a new library. Finally, in November, 1972, the county unveiled a new, 4,500 square foot library located at the city's civic center on West Drive. It has served the City of Desert Hot Springs ever since.

The population of the city in 1970 was 2,738 people. About half of them were senior citizens. Cities throughout the Coachella Valley were prospering, and the need for housing continued to rise. Land was plentiful and inexpensive in Desert Hot Springs, and more families of modest means began to move into town. The population of the city began to take off beginning in the 1980s. Chart 1 illustrates the trend that continues through the present.

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, in 2015 the population of Desert Hot Springs was 28,335 people. Table 1 presents census data for 2015. Fifty percent identified themselves as Hispanic or Latino, and

Chart 1
Population Increases, Desert Hot Springs
1970-2010



Source: CityData.com

Table 1

U.S. Census, Desert Hot Springs, California

Quick Facts, 2010

Population estimates	28,335 (2015)
Persons under 5 years	9.0%
Persons under 18 years	31.0%
Persons 65 years and older	9.6%
Female Persons	49.9%
White alone	58.0%
Black or African American alone	8.2%
American Indian and Alaska native	1.4%
Asian alone	2.6%
Native Hawaiian and other Pacific Islander	.3%
Two or more races	5.0%
Hispanic or Latino	52.0%
White alone, not Hispanic or Latino	34.4%
Veterans	1,322 (2014)
Foreign born persons	24.0%
Households	9,164 (2014)
Persons/household	3.0 (2014)
Language other than English spoken in household	47.1% (2014)
Median household income (in 2014 \$)	33,575 (2014)
Per capita income in past 12 months (in 2014 \$)	14,466
Persons in poverty	33.1%*

* This geographic level of poverty and health estimates are not comparable to other geographic levels of these estimates.

another 12% were made up of non-white minorities. Forty-seven percent lived in households where English is not the language spoken. By 2014, the median household income was \$33,575, and per capita income was \$14,446. Thirty-three percent of us lived in poverty.

One factor to bear in mind when examining population figures for Desert Hot springs is the vast open spaces surrounding the city. This unincorporated land is home to many smaller communities such as Sky Valley and Painted Hills, and various housing developments and mobile home parks. When they are included, the population count rises to 55,278, according to the U.S. Census. They rely on the city for services and their numbers have the biggest impact on school enrollments, discussed below.

The financial crisis of 2007-08 hit the City of Desert Hot Springs hard, as it did in many other communities throughout the United States. Whole neighborhoods were hollowed out by foreclosures. The ensuing recession exerted enormous pressure on the city's finance, and in 2014 a financial state of emergency was declared. With rigorous discipline, the City Council reduced spending and crafted balanced budgets over the next two years. Volunteers stepped up to help in any capacity they could. At this writing, the city's financial situation has stabilized and there are indications of continued improvement.

Many other changes have occurred in Desert Hot Springs, and indeed the world, over the forty-four year life of our library. There were just two elementary schools in town in 1970. Now there are eight schools plus Edward L. Wenslaff Alternative High School.

No. Of Students as of 2015-16

Desert Hot Springs High School	2,014
Desert Springs Middle School	942
Painted Hills Middle School	908
Bubbling Wells Elementary School	744
Julius Corsini Elementary School	583
Cabot Yerxa Elementary School	708
Two Bunch Palms Elementary	956
Bella Vista Elementary School	972

Forty percent of the city's population is under the age of eighteen. Including the unincorporated population, 15,985 people under the age of eighteen live in the greater Desert Hot Springs area. While not all of them attend school in the city, many do. Palm Springs Unified School District expects to construct an additional high school and will probably have to add a middle school and elementary school as well.

Table 2, Riverside County Library Statistics, gives a breakdown, of relevant statistics on library traffic, circulation, computer usage, and programs at each of the eight Riverside County library branches in the Coachella Valley. These are year-to-date totals as of June 2016. Table 3 lists the total population and percentage of people under age eighteen for each of the cities represented in Table 2 as well as the cities in the Palm Springs Unified School District.

What these tables reveal is that, by and large, the Desert Hot Springs library accomplishes more with less due to, in no small measure, its dedicated and imaginative staff. For example, the Desert Hot Springs branch was open the least number of hours of all the branches, and served more than 118,000 patrons. Indio, with a population of 70,036, was open more hours and was visited by 63,000 users. La Quinta, which operated an additional six hundred and fourteen hours, served about 4,500 fewer patrons than Desert Hot Springs. La Quinta has a population 37,476.

Public access to computers is a critical need for the city as many of our residents do not have personal computers in their homes, and a child without a computer is at an extreme disadvantage in keeping up and flourishing in school. Limits on Wifi capacity and space at the Desert Hot Springs branch severely restrain its computer capabilities. Yet with one-third the number of computers that La Quinta has, Desert Hot Springs hosted more than half the users that La Quinta did. This disparity carries through with all eight branches. Cathedral City is fortunate enough to have thirty-eight computers and 17,852 sessions occurred. Desert Hot Springs, with nine computers, still experienced 7,760 sessions, about half the volume with about a quarter of the resources.

Table 2
Riverside County Library System Statistics
Year-to-Date as of June 2016

	Cathedral City	Coachella	Desert Hot Springs	Indio	La Quinta	Mecca	Palm Desert	Thousand Palms
<u>Library Usage</u>								
Door Count	148,425	45,431	118,799	62,633	114,238	35,292	214,576	23,433
Hours Open	1,508	1,336	1,265	1,342	1,614	1,352	2,019	1,342
<u>Circulation Activity</u>								
Adult	30,533	4,439	15,179	16,262	60,808	6,201	112,476	7,113
Young Adult	2,045	720	902	1,808	4,437	644	7,139	440
Juvenile	17,413	7,915	6,478	14,468	41,823	4,676	56,399	5,652
Total Circulation	49,991	13,074	22,559	32,538	107,068	11,523	176,014	13,205
New Cards Added	1,480	1,064	950	1,393	1,399	327	2,501	278
Items Added	2,018	766	851	1,347	4,525	616	4,775	809
<u>Computer Usage</u>								
# of Computers	38	11	9	15	28	13	42	12
# of Sessions	17,852	5,730	7,761	12,767	11,411	4,875	23,104	4,140
<u>Volunteers</u>								
# of Volunteers	109	2	45	35	176	3	914	61
Volunteer Hours	885	40	438	916	1,321	24	1,611	261
<u>Programs</u>								
Preschool Story Time	25	80	34	22	34	—	42	—
Attendance	231	1,414	394	406	855	—	1,181	—
Elementary Story Time	—	92	—	7	41	—	—	—
Attendance	—	615	—	218	1,059	—	—	—
Y. A. Programs	44	21	—	25	37	4	40	5
Attendance	395	99	—	244	358	35	590	25
Bi-lingual Story Time	18	33	—	23	5	37	—	35
Attendance	371	737	—	1,289	66	436	—	697
Family Programs	24	124	23	4	43	590	28	7
Attendance	830	937	490	79	1,933	137	2,364	466
Adult Programs*	2	12	3	6	39	1	93	42
Attendance	9	200	84	45	383	165	3,269	221

*Includes E S L

Table 3

Population by City Where Riverside County Library has a Branch

U. S. Census, Quick Facts, 2010

	<u>Under 18 Years Old</u>	<u>Population</u>
Cathedral City*	34.0%	53,826
Coachella	49.8%	44,635
Desert Hot Springs*	40.01%	28,335
Indio	33.0%	70,000
La Quinta	26.6%	37,476
Mecca	44.1%	8,577
Palm Springs*	17.6%	47,371
Palm Desert	49.8%	51,869
Rancho Mirage*	13.1%	18,083
Thousand Palms (Unincorporated)	25.6%	7,715

* Cities represented by Palm Springs Unified School District

Perhaps its most frustrating shortcoming is the library's size, 4,500 square feet. There is no community room, no conference room, not even an employee break room to speak of, and the branch manager's office is also a storeroom. Space limitations profoundly impact all library services. While the city has been generous with the Carl May Center where City Counsel meets, the library must compete with various other community groups as well as city commissions and committees for space on the calendar. This limits the number of large group programs the library can sponsor. Having an additional community room would not only benefit the library, it would be a welcome addition for the city.

There are no spaces for small group activities such as book discussions and classes. Many patrons, especially older residents, have asked for computer classes. Not only is there no space for additional computers, there is no place to conduct a class. The community would also benefit from a literacy program, E. S. L. classes, and expanded homework help.

This is more than a space issue as square footage is a primary component of the matrix used by Library Services and Systems in determining individual library budgets. The Desert Hot Springs branch is considered a "small" library, even though the community it serves today is nine times larger than the population of the town it was built to serve.

Finally, there is the issue of circulation and "items added." The Desert Hot Springs branch needs more materials, especially DVDs and books. The branch manager has made space available for a small local history collection, and thanks to the generosity of the L. G. B. T. community, recently unveiled the Pride Collection. The library still needs to expand its Spanish language collection. Although Library Services and Systems has an intra-library loan program with other branches in the system it manages for Riverside County, it does not adequately meet the needs of Desert Hot Springs residents on site. One measure of success all libraries share is the goal of increasing circulation. That simply can't happen if the materials aren't on the shelves.

Mayor Scott Matas, in his State of the City address in January 2016, made the happy announcement that Desert Hot Springs had been green lighted for a new library. Elated, Friends of the Desert Hot Springs Library volunteers went to work immediately to identify exactly what the city needs. They developed a needs analysis survey that circulated from April through October, 2016. One hundred surveys were completed and tabulated. They indicated robust traffic in books, DVDs, CDs, and computer usage.

The seven most frequently asked for services are:

- o more programs and events
- o more computers and technology
- o food
- o community room
- o tutorials
- o computer classes
- o better furnishings

The eight most cited “best things” about the library are:

- o the staff
- o location
- o that we have one
- o programs
- o books, movies, information
- o as a community meeting place
- o safe place
- o inter-library loan

The five most cited improvements identified by patrons are:

- o make it bigger
- o more books
- o new building
- o improve publicity
- o security

Mayor Pro-tem Joe McKee met with members of the Riverside County Economic Development Agency in late April 2016 and was informed that the City’s portion of the construction cost for a 10,000 square foot library building would be in the range of \$7.5 million. Unfortunately, many city services have been reduced or eliminated because of the financial state of emergency, and are only now beginning to come back on line.

A new library stands at the end of a very long queue of financial requests as the City continues to work its way out of this financial situation. The news from the Riverside County Economic Development Agency dashed any hope for a new library in the foreseeable future.

Discouraged but undeterred, the Friends of the Desert Hot Springs library decided to create a new independent nonprofit corporation to raise money for the library, including a new building and expanded library services. The group, Advocates for the Desert Hot Springs Library, developed the following mission statement:

Our mission is to work for the improvement and expansion of library services in the City of Desert Hot Springs. Our fundraising efforts will focus on, but not be limited to, facility improvements, expansion of all library materials and computer services, and coordination with other fund raising efforts from interested community groups.

Advocates intends to aggressively pursue grants and develop fundraising events.

Two constants thread their way through our history in Desert Hot Springs. First, there is a tradition of volunteering to help our neighbors. The first homesteaders made themselves available to one another as they built permanent homes, dug wells, shared tools and supplies, and checked in with each other in an often hostile desert environment. Mr. L. W. Coffee worked selflessly for the improvement of the town that he invented, locating and drilling the first hot water well, laying out the town grid map, lobbying for and financing the first post office, and pushing for street lighting. When the town needed a new library, people showed up to build it. Today, there are more than four thousand volunteers connected through the internet and Facebook. They spend Saturday mornings on cleanup crews throughout town and they serve on a variety of commissions and committees including Public Safety Commission, Community and Cultural Affairs Commission, Human Rights Commission, Finance Committee, Education Committee, Citizen on Patrol, and the Friends of the Desert Hot Springs Library.

The second constant is affordability. The first settlers were drawn to the area by its beauty, isolation, and the chance to make a life for themselves through homesteading. Mr. Coffee seized the opportunity to provide the healthful benefits of our natural mineral waters to all who suffered. Dr. Robert Bingham expanded this vision as

the Director of Angel View Crippled Children's Foundation where no child was turned away because his or her family couldn't afford to pay. And finally, housing remains within reach of those earning middle class incomes.

Public libraries are an essential component of a community's educational and cultural infrastructure. They are a vital rung in the ladder that scales the walls of poverty in poor cities and towns. With a 33% poverty rate, Desert Hot Springs must have a larger, more comprehensive library. The city will continue to grow and expand. Our children need all the educational resources we can provide for the bright future we all dream of for them. We require the best library we can make to enhance our quality of life and ensure our future prosperity.

Sources

california.hometownlocator.com, 2015 U.S. Census data for Desert Hot Springs CDC.

City-Data.com, Stats about all U.S. Cities.

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The Desert Sentinel, "New Library Draws Crowds of Visitors," November 11, 1972.

Friends of the Desert Hot Springs Library, Needs Analysis Survey, April – October 2016.

Hunt, J., *The Waters of Comfort*, Little Morongo Press, Desert Hot Springs, 1997, revised 2006.

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Palm Springs Unified School District, Student Enrollment Projections, Summer, 2015/2016.

United States Census, 2010, 2015.

Appendix

Summary

Desert Hot Springs Library Library Needs Analysis Survey

1. Are you a resident of:

Desert Hot Springs	81
Mission Lakes	4
Rural Desert Hot Springs	2
North Palm Springs	1
Other	2

2. Are you a year round or seasonal resident?

Year Round	89
Seasonal	1

3. Do you feel the library is essential?

Yes	82
No	8

4. How many children are in your household?

One	7
Two	19
Three	11
Four	3
Five	4
Six	1

What age range?

One through six years	35
Six through eleven years	56
Eleven through seventeen	54

5. Do you or anyone in your family have a library card?

Yes	63
No	16

6. Which library services do you use?

Library media such as:

Books	65	DVDs, CDs	39
Recorded Books, MP3	22	Periodicals/magazines	12

Computers for:

Business purposes	18	Internet access	29
Student Research	17	Homework assistance	13
General Research	25	Other	6

Programs such as Summer Reading, Local Authors series, Jazz Cafe	33
Homework help and reference assistance	13

7. What library services not offered at the Desert Hot Springs Library would you like to see added?

More programs and events	18
More computers and technology	14
Food	6
Good as it is	4
Community room	4
Tutorials	3
Computer classes	3
Better furnishings	2

8. What changes to the library scheduled days and hours would make it more convenient for you and your family?

More hours	17
Current schedule is good	12
Open Monday through Saturday	12
Open Monday through Sunday	2

9. On a weekly basis, how often do you visit the library?

Once per week	17
More than once per week	17
Less than once per week	21

10. How do you usually get to the library?

Car	68	Bicycle	2
Public Transportation	6	Walk	19

11. What is the best thing about the Desert Hot Springs library?

Staff	25
Location	13
That we have one	7
Programs	7
Books, movies, information	5
As a community meeting place	2
Safe place	2
Inter-library loans	2

12. What would you suggest to improve the Desert Hot Springs library?

Make it bigger	24
More books	13
New building	12
Improve publicity	8
Security	7

13. Do you feel the library has appropriate and adequate security?

Yes	63
No	23

Comments on security:

"From what I've heard, middle school students can be a bit rowdy."

"You need better security outside to prevent fights."

"Better security so we don't have persons hanging around who are not using the library."

"Safe during the day."

"There's always fights, so no they don't."

Two people responded, "There are fights all the time."