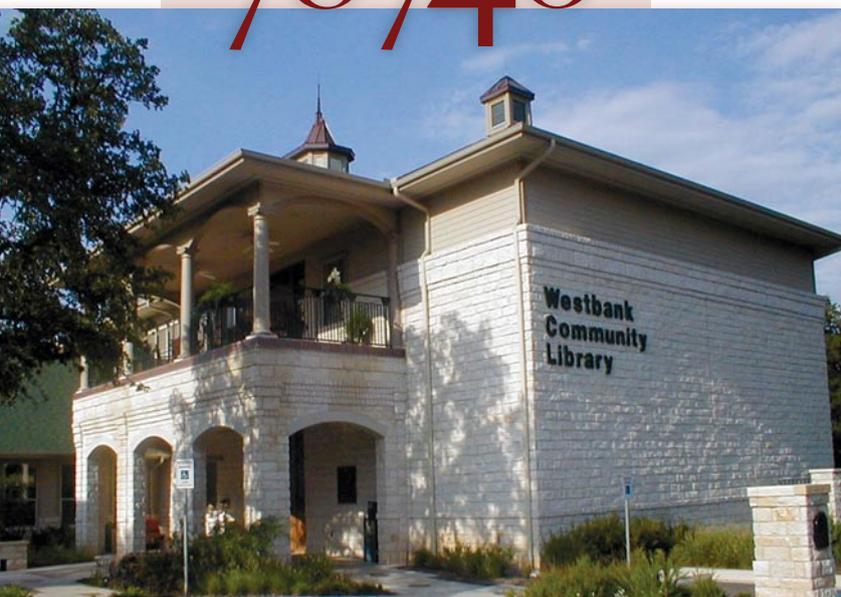


U.S. ZIP CODE  
**78746**



# Westbank Community Library

Austin, Texas

**Address:** 1309 Westbank Drive  
Austin, TX 78746  
**Date Founded:** 1983  
**Date Built:** 1989  
**Architect:** G. Tim Aynesworth  
**Director:** Beth Wheeler Fox

In 1983 Texas had no library districts. It was with Texas grit that Doris Walcutt, Eleanor Drake, and sixty-five Austin residents created a library for the Westbank area. Relying on donations and volunteers to stay open, the Westbank Community Library was first located in Texas Commerce Bank in southwest Austin. With the advice, support, and active encouragement of library leaders and local legislators, the Westbank Community Library led the charge in 1998 to pass legislation to create their own library district (and, to date, a dozen others) in Texas. Stable funding was at last guaranteed; the current library was built and dedicated in 1989.



## Potluck and Chocolate

Westbank Community Library has more than a half-million items in circulation. More than 250,000 people use the 15,640-square-foot facility each year. It offers twenty-five computer terminals for public use, more than four thousand video and audio tapes, and 150 magazine and newspaper subscriptions. The library also has one of the most successful volunteer programs in the area: More than one hundred volunteers a week process books, keep the shelves organized, and operate the circulation desk. The library makes sure that the volunteers know how much they are appreciated with yearly potluck dinners, training luncheons, and a steady supply of chocolate. Many volunteers are teens who serve after school, on weekends, and during their summer vacations. They earn credit hours toward their school's community service requirements as they learn how important the library is to their community and how important they are to it.

Westbank Community Library's goal has always been to serve every sector of the community. It offers a summer reading program that begins with the Kick-Off Party, which more than a thousand people attend on a Saturday to enjoy live musical performances, crafts, face painting, and organized games. During June and July there are weekly story times for the younger set,

Libraries are community treasure chests, loaded with a wealth of information available to everyone equally, and the key to that treasure chest is the library card.

—Laura Bush

craft and science activities, special performances, and a kids' book group, all culminating in an end-of-program celebration that includes a walk down a red carpet, a certificate, and a prize. For teens there are special book groups, Game Day, and Library Lock-In featuring pizza and a scavenger hunt. Even adults have their own Raffle Readers program, in which each book they read becomes an entry in a prize drawing. As a result of these efforts, there is increased interest in reading as well as in the library.



## Partnering with the Community

In addition to entertainment, the library is keen on education. It has established a working relationship with area schools, sponsoring a brunch in the autumn for teachers, another in the spring for local school librarians, and a special event for booster club presidents. The library's collection is designed in part to enrich the schools' curriculum and to be a source of homework help. Research databases and help from a library technician in how to use them are available. After-hours database training sessions are held for home educators and other groups.

The library also serves as a community center. Young children



Mark Twain sculpture by Scott Sustek, presented by the Friends of the Library as a twentieth anniversary gift in 2004.

and mothers meet for morning story hour. Teens meet to study after school. Adults use the upstairs meeting rooms for daytime group meetings; tutors and their students use them in the evening. The Teen Advisory Committee meets at least four times a year to suggest programs, recommend purchases, and give input on other library matters. The committee has helped to sponsor Teen Read Week, which includes guest speakers, informal meetings with teens who like to write, and a creative group activity. The library holds an annual craft sale, and there's even a space where people learning to speak English can meet and converse. Twice a year the library hosts library districts meetings, at which training and networking opportunities are made available to fledgling districts in the state.

Thousands of books are donated to the library each year—many are redistributed to library branches, non-profit organizations, and schools. Each week a box of books is donated to the Rotary Literacy Reach Out and Read Program, which delivers books to clinics serving low-income families. Each child receives a book and a “prescription for reading.” The library also participates in the American Library Association’s Adopt a Library Program to help rebuild a Gulf Coast public library after Hurricane Katrina.



## Just Rewards

Westbank Community Library was named a Great American Public Library by the Hennen American

Heart of the Community: **The Libraries We Love**

Public Library ratings in 1999. The Texas Municipal Director’s Association has honored the library with a statewide Achievement of Excellence Award, and Library Director Beth Wheeler was honored by the Texas Library Association as the 2006 Librarian of the Year.

The library’s dream of better serving the growing western portion of their district has become a reality with the one-million-dollar donation of ten acres of land. The design phase for a branch library began in 2006.



Teens show off their favorite reads at the Teen Lock-In.

