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'There are ways we can help' Technology makes Dwight Foster library more accessible

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Deb Bauer, adult services librarian, demonstrates how to use the LA-90 Portable Inductive Loop system located at each of the three service stations at Dwight Foster Public Library.

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FORT ATKINSON — The Dwight Foster Public Library is making accessibility a priority with the introduction of new technology aimed at enhancing the experience for patrons with hearing and visual impairments.

Thanks to a grant from the Bridges Library System, the library has implemented tools that create a more inclusive environment for all visitors. “If you haven’t been here recently, please come,” said Deb Bauer, adult services librarian. “We have a lot of new technology accessibility tools.”

The Library Improvement and Innovation Grant, awarded for 2024, allowed the library to invest in a range of assistive devices under the initiative titled “Technology Enhancement for the Visually Impaired.”

This funding facilitated the purchase of 10 large-print computer keyboards, 10 trackball mice, three ultra-bright magnifiers, six cordless table lamps, and one LA-90 Portable Inductive Loop system at each of the library’s three service stations.

“We have one patron, and I know that uses this (ultra-bright magnifier) every time he comes in,” said Bauer.



The LA-90 Portable Inductive Loop system located at each of the three service stations at Dwight Foster Public Library.

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Among the most impactful additions is the LA-90 Portable Inductive Loop system, a hearing enhancement device that creates a personalized “sound bubble” for those with hearing impairments. Whether or not a patron wears a hearing aid, the system amplifies sound, making it easier to engage with librarians and navigate the space. Equipped with a built-in microphone, the system transmits sound directly to the hearing aid via the “T” or loop program, reducing distractions and improving clarity.

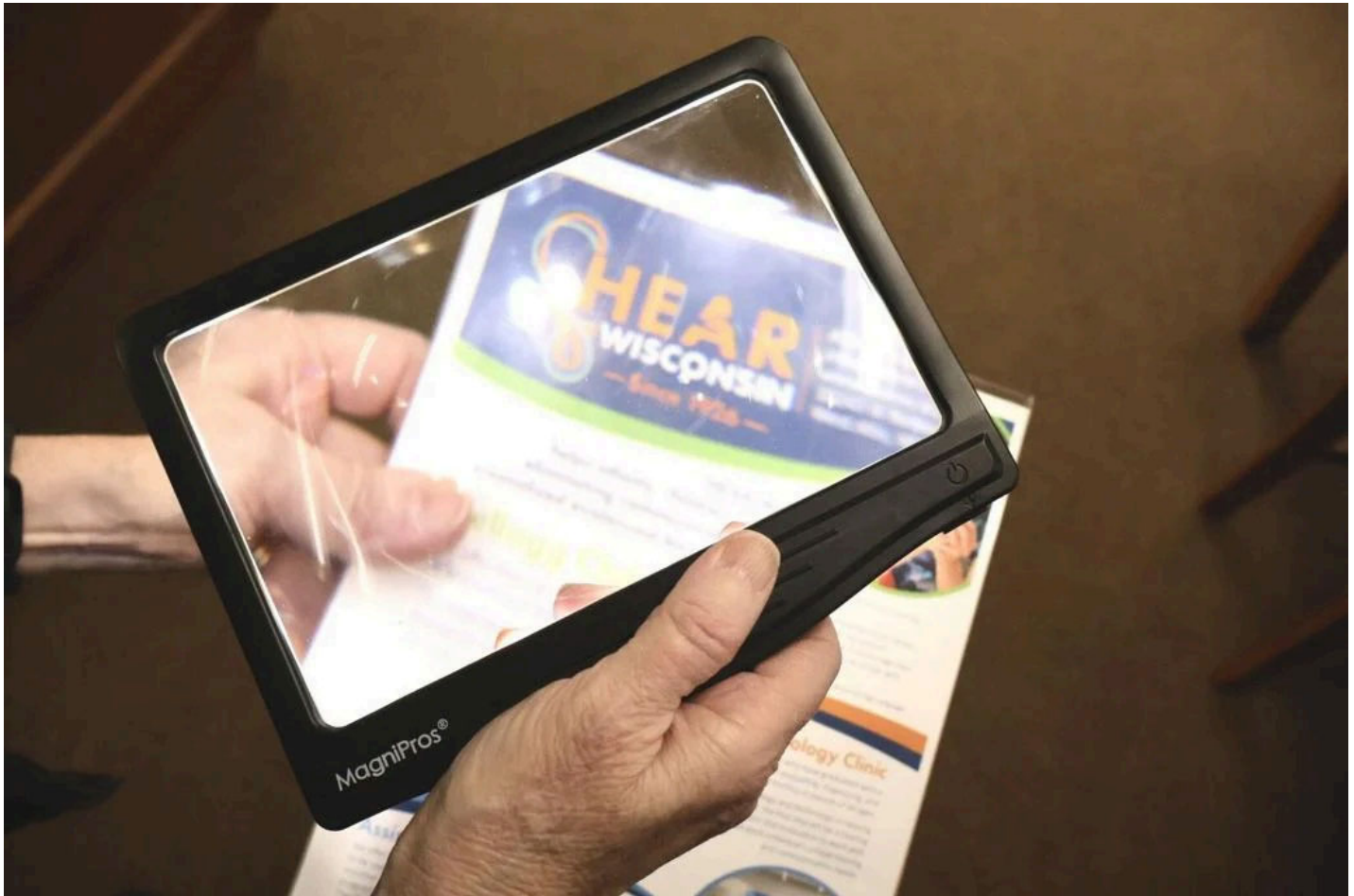
“If you have any sort of vision or hearing impairment, there are ways we can help,” said Bauer. “I think it’s just getting the word out that there are things available for everyone.”

Beyond hearing assistance, the library has introduced other accessibility tools to support patrons with visual and dexterity challenges. Large-type keyboards with high-contrast keys make computer use easier for those with visual impairments.



Deb Bauer, adult services librarian, demonstrates how to use the LA-90 Portable Inductive Loop system.

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“We have one patron, and I know that uses this (ultra-bright magnifier) every time he comes in,” said Deb Bauer, demonstrating the use of the ultra-bright magnifier.

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“We’ve had people that don’t need a large-type keyboard, but they said they love using them,” said Bauer. Trackball mice provide an alternative for individuals with limited dexterity or arthritis. Portable magnifiers with adjustable lighting offer greater clarity for readers, and cordless table lamps enhance study areas in low light situations.

Frequent visitor Judy Wittenwyler, appreciates the table lamps for puzzle-solving. “Some of the puzzles that are darker and stuff, it’s hard to tell,” said Wittenwyler. “They help. They help a lot.”

The library remains committed to fostering an inclusive environment where every visitor, regardless of ability, can fully engage in the joy of learning and discovery.



One of the 10 new large print computer keyboards now available for use at the Dwight Foster Public Library.
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“I think it’s just an effort among all libraries to become more accessible to all patrons,” said Bauer. “This (the LA-90 Portable Inductive Loop system) was something that we could try with the support of the Bridges system.”



A Dwight Foster Public Library patron utilizing one of the 6 cordless table lamps.

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Judy Wittenwyler using one of the 6 cordless table lamps for her puzzle solving at the Dwight Foster Public Library.
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