

# Farmington's winning combination: A top-notch staff and extended self-service hours

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by [Zach Miller](#)



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## QUICK SUMMARY

*When Dakota County Library's branch in Farmington is open, its staff creates programming and provides in-person service that are valued by the community. When it's closed, self-service hours extend access to the library by a whopping 71 hours per week. Patrons love the combination.*



When a young patron entered Farmington Library shortly after its 2014 renovation, he began jumping up and down and exclaimed, "[It's bigger on the inside!](#)" He was right about that, but it wasn't because science fiction had become reality. A wall had come down at the back, adding space to the library that had previously been leased to the local school district. The drop ceiling was also removed, and the height of shelving surrounding the main service desk was reduced by half, creating a welcoming space with generous sight lines.

mighty" staff that is known for its excellent customer service. Andrew Cook has been contributing to that reputation for over 30 years. Svoboda calls him "a wizard of a librarian" who can do practically anything. He excels at readers' advisory. Youth Services Librarian Aimee Schreiber has been at Farmington for less than two years, but was quick to hit her stride. She organizes the popular Lego Club whose most recent output is on display in the image above. Her Story Time in the Park program, a summertime partnership with Farmington's Department of Parks and Recreation, is very popular. There were 69 children at this week's event. Musical Mornings, likewise held outdoors at a public park, is a hit, too. At this week's event, featuring Saint Paul-based jazz and dance outfit [Rhythmically Speaking](#), Schreiber welcomed 88 attendees. Musical Mornings is a partnership with Farmington Public Schools' Early Childhood Family Education.

Farmington Library benefits from its status as a branch of the Dakota County Library, which operates an interlibrary loan and delivery system and makes book club kits, story time kits, and much more, available in Farmington. The story time kits are popular among daycare groups and parents who homeschool their children.

The library in Farmington got its start when a local doctor founded it in his home in 1868. Today, Farmington's populace is young. It may even be the most youthful in Dakota County, and it shows in the library's circulation statistics. Children's books are the most popular part of the collection. That doesn't mean the library's adult patrons go wanting, however. Svoboda leads sewing classes. Most recently, she taught her students to make bucket hats, of great value in the summer. Yet another partnership, this one with the [Dakota County Master Gardener Volunteers](#), makes the branch's impressive heirloom seed library possible.

When it's open, Farmington's staff make the library an incredible resource for their patrons. Farmington is a bedroom community, lying just south of the Twin Cities, and for years on her northward drive home, Svoboda has been a nightly witness to a seemingly endless stream of headlights. To her, those headlights represented the many Farmington residents shut out from access to the library. That's why she was enthusiastic when Dakota County Library Director Margaret Stone approached her with the idea of a pilot project to explore self-service hours at the library. A similar project in Scott County had generated interest from the community as well as a County Commissioner, who raised the idea with Stone.

Farmington Library's pilot project, the first of its kind in Dakota County, began this January and ended in June. It was a resounding success. To access the library during self-service hours, patrons simply watch a training video, sign up on the library's website and pick up an access card. Their accounts are verified by staff at the county library's headquarters in Eagan, who then inform Farmington about the approval. Staff give first-time participants a tour, along with instructions for safe and proper use of the library, before their scheduled visit is allowed to occur.

Svoboda has heard from many appreciative patrons who previously struggled to make it to the library, but now have an easy time coming during self-service hours. Girl Scout troops, the local homeowners association, and various other organizations are taking advantage. A local teacher with young children at home who is pursuing her PhD has found that quiet

program.

Enthusiastic support from patrons (more than 400 of whom participated during the pilot phase) and the evident benefit to the community have resulted in self-service hours becoming a permanent offering in Farmington. The hours run from 6:00 a.m. to noon and 8:00-11:00 p.m. Monday through Wednesday, 6:00-9:00 a.m. and 5:00-11:00 p.m. Thursday through Saturday, and 6:00 a.m. to 11:00 p.m. every Sunday, a total of 71 additional hours of library access per week.

"It's all about the library being the last real community hub," Schreiber says. "It doesn't cost you any money, but you can come here and enrich your life. Sing, read, write, play. Bring your family. Find a safe space and be yourself. Connect with your community. The library is singular at making all that possible."

 TAGS:

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## WRITTEN BY

**Zach Miller**

Head of Communications

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