

## Revive public library system

**C**ebu City has implemented a project that can help reduce juvenile delinquency in its area and improve the academic standards of its students.

According to reports, early this month the city's Rizal Library, which will celebrate its centennial anniversary next year, commenced operation on 24-hours-seven-days-a-week basis to provide students with a secure and comfortable place to study.

The library is fully air-conditioned and has Wi-Fi facilities that enable the students to connect to the internet for research and other educational purposes.

With this facility, students do not have to go to fast-food centers to study and avail themselves of the latter's Wi-Fi connections and, in the process, spend money for food and drinks that would justify their prolonged stay in the premises. Add to this the risk of loss of their laptops and threat to their security when they study until closing time at night.

The library can also provide an alternative outlet for the city's youth who, for lack of suitable recreational facilities, engage in unwholesome activities, or, if they have the means, no matter how meager, spend their time in internet cafés to play software games.

Cebu City's 24/7 public library brings back memories of earlier years when Manila, Quezon City and adjacent cities maintained public libraries in strategic places that enabled their residents to read newspapers and books free of charge.

During summer breaks, these libraries

### COMMENTARY

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provided a convenient venue for students to spend their free time. The more academically inclined ones borrowed books to read in the comfort of their homes.

Many of the Philippines' reputable authors trace their interest and skill in writing to the time they spent in public libraries to read books and other literary materials.

Sadly, for unexplained reasons, these public libraries were phased out. The project was probably not vote-attractive enough to draw the interest of local government officials. The few libraries still in operation are inside city halls, but all that they make available for reading are newspapers and old books.

Admittedly, with the advent of television, radio, smartphones, tablets and other electronic gizmos, the art of reading has lost a lot of following. The lack of interest in the printed word is aggravated by the short attention span of the younger generation.

And the few who want to read more after school hours or during their free time have no place or facility to go to for their reading pleasure without incurring additional costs.

Going to the bookstores for this purpose is out of the question because these places are not designed to encourage their

customers to read their books within the premises. The "No reading" sign in some bookstores is proof of this objective.

There is a famous line that runs, "If you build it, they will come." By way of analogy, it means that if you put up a store, customers will come to patronize it. Or make an opportunity available and there will be people who will take advantage of it.

The same principle applies to public libraries. Build them and people will go there to enjoy the things they offer. Make reading materials in public libraries available free of charge to the youth and their innate sense of curiosity will encourage them to browse and read.

If the public library is air-conditioned and has modern learning gadgets, the youth may be inclined to spend their free time in it rather than in malls or internet shops that can put a hole in their parents' pockets.

By putting up a 24/7 public library, Cebu City has made a sound investment for its youth. Its costs may not be huge compared to big-ticket projects, but its payback in the future would definitely be tremendous.

The other cities can take a leaf from Cebu City's action. The public library need not be sophisticated or grand. As long as it is accessible, comfortable and has sufficient reading materials, it will serve its purpose and draw the crowd that stands to benefit from it most—the youth.

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