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Battle of Orland Park library's Internet porn policy heats up

By Donna Vickroy and Mike Nolan Sun-Times Media November 5, 2013 12:56AM

Megan Fox and Kevin DuJan addressed the board of the Orland Park Public Library on Monday, Nov. 4, 2013. | Donna Vickroy~Sun-Times Media

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Is south suburban mom Megan Fox on a campaign to make the Orland Park Public Library safer for patrons, as she insists? Or is she on an all-out drive to malign the facility, as library officials contend?

The monthlong battle between the southwest suburban library staff and Fox over adults' access to pornography on library computers took another tense turn on Monday.

Fox, a mother of two who homeschools her children, said that when she tried early Monday to hand out fliers claiming the two-story facility is "a dangerous place for children," she was told to leave.

Then Orland Park police were called.

Bridget Bittman, library spokeswoman, said no arrests were made. But Fox, who said she lives in Mokena but frequents several local libraries, and her friend, Kevin DuJan — who according to his blog, Hillbuzz.org, lives in Chicago — were reminded that, "We have a policy that states no leaflets may be distributed on library grounds," Bittman said

Monday's fight came indoors when Fox and DuJan, both writers, attended a special budget meeting of the library board to once again state their complaints that the library allows easy access to pornography and that people caught looking at obscene or illegal materials are not dealt with properly.

At the beginning of the meeting, library board President Nancy Healy read a statement reiterating the library's policy regarding access.

"We stand by our policy that allows adults unfiltered access to the Internet," Healy said.

Then Fox and DuJan each were given five minutes to speak.

Fox claims she has internal records proving that library staff routinely dismiss complaints about patrons accessing pornography on library computers.

After the meeting, Bittman said that in the past 12 years, the library has had seven instances of someone complaining about another patron accessing obscene material.

“We have filters on our children’s and teen’s computers,” Bittman said. “They are kept separate from the adult section; they are located on a different floor.”

Bittman added, “But adults are allowed unfiltered access. It supports First Amendment rights.

“That said,” Bittman added, “Accessing obscene or illegal material will not be tolerated and the police will be notified.”

The library does not stock magazines considered to be obscene.

Bittman said filters would not only limit a patron’s rights, they could ban access to sites college students or people doing research might need to access. Being denied access to the word “breast” might prevent a person from looking up breast cancer, for example, she said.

The battle began Oct. 4 after Fox tried to access a computer in the children’s section of the library. Adults who are not accompanied by children are not allowed to use the children’s computers.

Fox says she had her two children with her. Bittman, however, said two employees said she did not have youngsters with her in the children’s section that day. Fox and DuJan, however, dispute that account and say library officials are lying.

“She was told to use the computers in the adult section upstairs,” Bittman said.

Fox said she went upstairs, and immediately saw a man looking at pornographic images. She said she complained to a library staffer but that her objections were dismissed. DuJan said he saw three men looking at pornography.

Fox launched into a YouTube and Facebook campaign to get the library to change its policies. Fox also reviews young adult literature, with a specific eye toward obscenity.

“I read the books so other parents won’t have to,” she said.

DuJan is founder of a conservative political website, Hillbuzz.org, on which Fox is an active contributor with articles such as, “Are Public Schools Modern Altars for Child Sacrifice?” and “3 Ways to Know if You’re a Crappy Parent Courtesy of Dina Lohan.”

According to Barbara Jones, American Library Association (ALA) Director of Intellectual Freedom, “Librarians have a special role in our democracy to safeguard everyone’s access to information protected by the First Amendment.”

The ALA opposes any obstacle to library users’ access to constitutionally protected content, Jones said in a release, not only because such practices can violate the First Amendment, but because they hinder the library’s mission to provide free and open access to information.

Jones continued, “The Internet empowers users to choose for themselves the information they wish to view. Unlike collecting and purchasing books or magazines, the library provides access to the Internet as a whole. However, not every website is appropriate for young children.”

She added that the ALA takes the protection of children very seriously. Librarians work closely with parents to ensure that children view and borrow only age-appropriate material, she said.

Fox said filters on computers are not a violation of a person’s rights.

“All libraries limit behavior, from running to talking loudly. Other libraries don’t allow unfiltered access to porn. Why does this one?” Fox said. “Orland Park Library has become a Red Light District.”

CORRECTION

This story initially misidentified Orland Park Library board president Nancy Healy. The story also misattributed an account of an Oct. 4 dispute at the library involving staff and two patrons, Kevin DuJan and Megan Fox. DuJan, not Fox, said he saw three men viewing pornography on library computers. Fox said she saw one man viewing pornography that day. Library employees contend they did not see Fox accompanied by children in the children’s section, but did not speak to whether they were with her at the library that day.