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GATEWAY TO IMPERIAL COUNTY

Literacy and Learning Center unveiled at Imperial Public Library

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IMPERIAL — No one but Imperial Valley library officials and civic dignitaries showed up Saturday for the grand opening of the Imperial Public Library's Literacy and Learning Center.

But that didn't make its importance — or the sobering 30 percent functional illiteracy rate in Imperial County — any less significant as the center's operation was briefly discussed with U.S. Rep. Bob Filner, D-Chula Vista, in attendance.

Filner was there to meet with Imperial library administrator Christina Carter and others as the center was unveiled.

Through a \$57,000 grant Filner helped get for the center, 13 laptops and tables that can accommodate up to 24 people are among the things to help volunteer tutors teach people with their literacy needs, Carter said.

The Imperial Public Library's literacy program is part of the Imperial Valley's Libraries Empower All to Read Now effort that tailors its program to what an individual student needs to learn, said Susan Manger, assistant library director of the Brawley Public Library.

Manger also attended the literacy center's opening and spoke of the need for such places at a time when, according to statistics she cited from the California State Library, the illiteracy rate in the Imperial Valley is at an all-time high.

Manger said the rate was at 30 percent but said she believes that "it's probably a lot higher."

Functional illiteracy means that even though some people are not fully literate they can still function in society at some level, Manger said.

Monica Reyes, the Imperial Public Library's full-time literacy coordinator,

said when she started two years ago here there was only one student who needed instruction on computers.

Today there are as many as six or seven active students in the program with six people on a waiting list, Reyes said.

What the library needs are more volunteer tutors, Reyes said. The service is free and confidential to those who use it, Carter said.

Carter hopes that word-of-mouth about the literacy center in Imperial will help raise awareness about the service and bring more people out. People can call 760-336-2469 to get more information about the LEARN program and others like it throughout the county.

"A lot of people don't know about it," Reyes said.