Soon summer will be upon us. If your kids are like mine were, it won’t take long for the “I’m bored” phrase to rear its ugly head. Free activities are just around the corner at the Noel Wien Library.

The library is full of art, activities and, of course, books. And all of it is free for all of us to use.

Most of us don’t know all the services our library offers. I did a quick tour recently with Mary Ellen Baker, director of the library. Here are some of the things that I found.

Books are always available, but then, that’s what you would expect. However, the offerings spread to comic books, graphic novels, manga, audio books, music, magazines, newspapers and even large print books. Kids can check out a book and a CD to listen to the story being read.

Electronic offerings are widespread as well. There are e-books, which can be downloaded (even from your home), video games, videos, DVDs, movies and database access to lots of helpful materials such as auto repair manuals and genealogy information. There is Wi-Fi access for your computer, scanning, printing and videoconferencing services. Didn’t bring your computer? No problem, you can check out a laptop to work on while you are in the library.

Meeting rooms are available for your use. Though I have often used the large auditorium for presenting programs, there are many more rooms to use. There are group study rooms that hold groups from four to 10 people and a conference room.

The staff at the library has the needs of all our citizens in mind. There are books for the sight-impaired, for the hearing-impaired and ADA workstations for those needing help.

This summer there will be two summer reading programs for kids, one for the younger kids and one for young adults. Sign up the week of May 26 and read (or listen to) books
this summer. At the end of the summer, anyone who reads one book a week will be rewarded with a book to keep, thanks to a donation from Flint Hills.

Adults have several different book discussion groups. Whether you are into science, fantasy or politics, there is a group meeting to discuss the merits of books from the reading list.

Even without all the books and services, the library is well worth visiting. It is a warm, beautiful place to while away a few hours. The walls are covered with beautiful Alaska art, so be sure to take time to look around.

I was also out at the new North Pole library. What a beautiful building! It also has many of the same services that the Noel Wien Library has. If the North Pole Library is near you, take advantage of all its services.

If you can’t make it to either library, watch for the bookmobile to be in your area. There are also homebound services and the Alaska Mail Services (out of Juneau), which mails your selected books to you. Mail service is available to people who live in areas without public library access.

Our libraries here in this area are truly community centers. Take advantage of their services this summer. They are great examples of good things that come from your tax dollars at work.

Roxie Rodgers Dinstel is associate director of Cooperative Extension Service, a part of the University of Alaska Fairbanks, working in cooperation with the U.S. Department of Agriculture. Questions or column requests can be e-mailed to her at rrdinstel@alaska.edu or by calling 907-474-7201.