



Urban Times

# ARCHIVES

**FROM:** February 2008

## All hype aside: What does new Central Library have to offer?

BY SHANNON BLOOMQUIST

**I**N THE PUBLIC PSYCHE,” AUTHOR Barry Bowes once wrote, “a librarian is a woman of indeterminate age, who wears spectacles; a person with either a timorous disposition or an austere disposition, wearing a long sleeved blouse buttoned to the neck; someone who loves silence, likes books, and suffers people. Librarians don’t laugh. They are covered with a thin film of dust. They have pale skins, which, when touched (as if one ever could) might flake and prove to be reptilian scales.”

Bowes’s opinion of librarians is not altogether flattering,

but, for the record, I am one. A librarian, that is. While I am a woman and I do love books, I would like to argue that Mr. Bowes has me all wrong on most accounts (except, unfortunately, the reptilian skin).

Of course, as a librarian residing in Indianapolis, I have been following the progress of the new Central Library project for years. My fascination stems more from personal rather than professional interest. It’s true: I am not only a librarian, but a library user. Like most Circle City residents, I grew weary of the Interim Central Library and waited with mounting excitement for the grand opening of the new Central Library building on Dec. 9. With the myriad of positive press pieces focusing on the library’s innovative archi-



▲ A young family looks over the literary offerings in the unique second-floor area known as the “Learning Curve.”

tectural features, I began to wonder if there would be any more to the library than good looks and stunning views. Residents of Indy's Downtown neighborhoods deserve more than an attractive building for the \$153 million spent on the Central Library's renovation.

I admit that, on my inaugural visit to the Central Library, I was expecting to find an old gift cleverly wrapped in a new package: the same staff, the same books, and the same philosophy of public library service in a brand new, architecturally innovative building. Instead, I observed time and again that the Central Library's transformation goes deeper than cosmetics (and the librarians, thankfully, are neither dusty, reptilian, timorous, austere or humorless). The user-friendly features of the building reflect changes to the very heart and soul of the Central Library as an institution. While no library is perfect in every way, my visits left me with the impression that the new Central Library has something for everyone to enjoy. The following insights will, I hope, help people feel more familiar with the new facility's features as they begin their own explorations.

**General information.** Two large elevators as well as up and down escalators are available to transport library visitors to all six floors of the building. All floors feature information desks staffed with library workers ready to answer questions about the library's collections, services, programs, and general inquiries for information. Restrooms are available on every floor and are handicap accessible. The staff reports that 98 percent of the collection is out on the floor and available for patrons to access rather than tucked away in a dusty basement as it was for so many years. Shelving is designed to showcase books, with materials facing outward near the ends of each aisle so that users can browse an area of interest with ease. Signage is clear and less "librarian-esque" than before, employing terminology such as "Information" rather than "Reference" to label desks where patrons will find library staff ready to answer their questions. The building is well-lit and the stacks are conveniently spaced for people who walk or who use a wheelchair. Plans are in place for a drive-up book drop to be installed on 9th Street in the next few months so that patrons may return books without having to leave their cars.

**Staff.** Many people feel like they are "bothering" library staff members by asking questions. Remember that library staff members in any library have one main responsibility: to help patrons. Visitors who have a question of any sort – about the collection, about how to update a resume, about who came in third in the 1957 Indianapolis 500, about where to find the nearest restroom – should ask a librarian. High-tech communication

*This report on accessibility features of the new Central Library was not included in the February issue of Urban Times.*

## **New facility is highly accessible**

**T**HE OLD CRET BUILDING WAS FAR FROM accessible for many Indianapolis residents with mobility, visual, auditory and learning disabilities – but this has changed thanks to the Central Library's new assistive technology center. Located on the third floor, this room contains adaptive workstations and equipment that can assist patrons with disabilities in accessing print, audio, and visual materials. Specialized computer accessories such as keyboards, mice, typing aids, and arm supports are available, as are several software programs such as JAWS, OpenBook, WYNN, and Dragon Naturally Speaking. Patrons must speak to the third-floor information desk staff in order to access this room.

In addition to the assistive technology center, the Central Library has added many helpful features within the library to make it easier for persons with disabilities to access library resources. All public computers and catalog stations offer Windows Magnifier so patrons can enlarge the print on the computer screen. Magnifying glasses and trackballs are available by request from the information desks on each floor of the library. Baskets and carts may be used by persons as they browse the shelves on each floor, and hand-held magnifiers can be checked out at the 3rd floor information desk for four-hour increments of time for use in the library. ZoomText Internet software is available on a PC with a large type keyboard and a trackball located in the 1st floor computer lab. For programs, a sign language interpreter can be requested two-weeks in advance by people who are deaf or hearing impaired.

Patrons requiring Braille or talking book services should continue to visit the Indiana State Library's Talking Book and Braille Library located at 140 N. Senate Avenue. The Central Library has chosen not to duplicate the specialized services provided by the Indiana State Library for those who are blind or have visual impairments, so Braille resources are still not a part of the collection. In addition, very little Braille is used in building labels. I only noticed it on the restroom signs. I was assured by library staff that persons who are blind or have extremely low vision may request a guide at any information desk to help them to navigate the Central Library as needed. ■

badges allow library staff to contact each other from anywhere in the building within seconds to serve patrons more quickly and efficiently in this new, large building. Information desks on each floor are typically staffed with two or more people to field patron inquiries.

**Pedal power.** Those who wish to bike to the library will be pleased to find bicycle racks in front of both the St. Clair Street and 9th Street entrances. For walkers, street-level entrances are located off of St. Clair Street by entering through the historic Cret building or off of 9th Street on the north side of the building. A street-level entrance ramp is available for patrons requiring wheelchair access at the 9th Street doors only.

**Parking aplenty.** For those who drive to the Central Library, hundreds of parking spaces are available in a well-lit and affordable parking facility connected to the library with an entrance off of Pennsylvania Street. The garage is open 15 minutes before and after regular library hours. Before visiting, check [www.imcpl.org](http://www.imcpl.org) to find directions to the garage as well as a very reasonable fee schedule (parking for 30 minutes or less is free). Pay stations available in the atrium and the garage lobbies accept coins, cash, and credit cards. Patrons may also make use of a credit card-only pay-in-line station as they exit the garage in their cars. Alarm buttons throughout the garage provide direct voice communication to the security staff. The most pleasant surprise in the parking garage, however, is the permanent art installations which grace the upper- and lower-level garage lobbies for visitors to enjoy as they wait on an elevator.

**Films and audiobooks.** Feature films and audiobooks may be found in the new part of the Central Library on the first floor. Staff members stationed in the film and audiobook room assist patrons with locating and checking out these materials. Patrons will also notice that administrative offices and the book return area are located on the library's lower level.

**Let's get fictional.** The Library Board of Trustees established several guiding principles for the Central Library's design, one of which mandates that architect Paul Cret's 1917 building "must be preserved, highlighted, and continue to serve as a library by containing a significant amount of the collection." In accordance with this goal, the old Cret building is now home to the Central Library's fiction acquisitions, including the large print collection as well as the browsing paperback collection. Newer mysteries, science fiction, romance, and westerns are found in the Simon Reading Room, while the Annis and Sexton Reading Rooms

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## DEWEY DISCOVERED

### Floor 3: 000-379 (Education, Law, Religion, Economics, Social Issues)

- Periodicals
- Foundation collection (nonprofit reference materials focusing on fundraising, budgeting, management, grant opportunities, and proposal writing)
- Microfilm and microfiche

### Floor 4: 380-769 (Languages, Business, Sciences, Arts, Family, Home)

- Language Lab: Employs a free online tool called "Tell Me More" to help patrons hone their reading, writing, listening, speaking, vocabulary, and grammar skills in Spanish, French, German, Italian, Dutch, and English as a Second Language
- Patent collection

### Floor 5: 770-899 (Music, Performing Arts, Literature, Sports)

- Music collection (scores, sheet music, CD's, and symphony programs)
- Four listening stations allow patrons to listen to music CD's before checking them out

### Floor 6: 900-999 (Biography, History, Travel)

- Indianapolis collection
- Indianapolis authors collection
- Fine printing collection
- Cookbook and menu collection

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house older items. A self-check station where patrons can check out materials (and pay your library fines by credit card if necessary) is available in the main lobby area of the Cret building. Plastic bags are also handy for transporting materials back home.

**Advice for readers.** The Cret building now boasts a Reader's Advisory Desk. Those who staff the desk assist patrons in selecting a fiction or nonfiction book to read based on the reader's interests. A great way people can find their next "favorite book" is to share the name of an author or book title they love and let the library staff work their magic to connect them with similar works they might also enjoy. People who like the "idea" of this desk should be sure to make use of it. Many library services only continue because statistics kept by the staff provide evidence that people take advantage of them. If no one uses reader's advisory services, chances are good that the desk probably

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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Shannon Bloomquist is a staff writer for Bloomquai Studios, a local video game company. A resident of cozy Irvington for almost six years, she is thrilled to live close enough to her office to bike to work. She received her masters degree in

library science from IUPUI in 2005 with a specialty in public librarianship. Formerly a reference librarian at both the Carmel Clay Public Library and the Indiana State Library, Shannon served patrons' information needs through reference services and

special programs. She also worked to establish Indiana's statewide digital library and collaborated with libraries across the state in digitizing their local history collections to make them more accessible to people everywhere.

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won't be staffed regularly. Central Library administrators can also ensure the relevance of this desk to the public by training library staff to smile, make eye contact with patrons, and even leave the desk for a few minutes at a time to ask people browsing the stacks if they would like any help.

**Information commons.** Much media coverage has been devoted to the library's magnificent four-story glass atrium. It serves as a "connector" linking the old Cret building with the new addition to the library. Patrons who take the parking garage elevators up to the library will enter the library's atrium upon exiting the elevator. One of the first things to notice is a round desk with "Information" signs posted above it. Staff members are there waiting to answer questions about the facility, the collection, library programs, how to get a library card, how to use the self-checkout machine, or anything else visitors might like to ask.

I am happy to report that on my visits I observed great customer service happening at this desk time and again. An open shelf displaying "holds" ready for pickup is also conveniently located in the atrium near the circulation desk. Two television monitors provide announcements on upcoming library events and programs, and there are brochures surrounding the main information desk that include library maps, information on special features of the facility, comment cards, and information on the Indianapolis area.

**Lattes at the library?** Perhaps the most "trendy" aspect of the new library is the atrium's Question Mark Café. Reminiscent of Border's and Barnes & Noble book stores, patrons may bring food and lidded drinks into all areas of the library. The atrium often features a band or performing arts group so that café patrons can enjoy some entertainment as they sip on Starbucks coffee and sample the many delectable goodies for sale. Small tables and chairs are adjacent to the café ordering area, and in warmer months, an exit into the lovely East Garden brings café patrons outdoors to enjoy the day if they wish. Library resources may also be taken outdoors into the East Garden.

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**THOSE WHO STAFF THE Reader's Advisory Desk assist patrons in selecting a fiction or nonfiction book to read based on the reader's interests. A great way people can find their next "favorite book" is to share the name of an author or book title they love and let the library staff work their magic to connect them with similar works they might also enjoy.**

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**Wireless wonderland.** The Central Library provides wireless Internet access to patrons throughout the entire facility. Library users can enjoy café fare as they surf the Net, or they can retire to quieter environs by plugging in at any of the library's many four-person tables along the perimeters of floors 3 through 6. Comfortable armchairs are also available on floors 3 through 6 for reading and laptop use. In addition, study rooms with eight-person conference tables are located on the third and fourth floors. Rooms may be reserved for two-hour blocks of time at the third- and fourth-floor information desks. Some may be reserved in advance while others are available only on a first-come, first-serve basis. The second floor's Learning Curve also has many laptop-friendly areas, so parents with children can keep an eye on their young ones and also get some work done!

**Computer cornucopia.** For visitors who do not have a laptop, the Central Library also features over 300 public computers featuring Microsoft Office software and Internet access (including the library's online catalog). Many terminals are located throughout the building, but a computer lab on the first floor houses 36 terminals for public use and has an adjacent training lab with 12 computers. The lab is used for programs relating to computer use, such as Internet searching, market research, job research, shopping online, and even "MySpace" orientation (check [www.imcpl.org](http://www.imcpl.org) for a list of Central Library computer training programs).

**Babies, teens and in-betweens.** Located on the second floor next to the atrium, the Learning Curve is museum-like in its embrace of discovery-based lifelong learning principles focusing on the idea that information is all around us. Exhibits nestled in the floor showcase technologies and tools of the past, such as a film projector and a card catalog. Info Guides don distinctive black lab coats making them easy to spot as they roam the Learning Curve asking patrons how they might be of assistance. Info Guides are also stationed at "Info Outposts" where children can check out laptops and find help with locating information. These library staffers lead spontaneous group activities and use technology to inspire lifelong learning in families and children. Well-lit book cases full of fiction and nonfiction children's collections are located throughout the Learning Curve.

Highlighted from the east end of the curve to the west end, the age-focused areas of the Learning Curve include:

- The Baby Zone: Magnetic play wall, child-friendly computers, and an interactive storytime theater
- Group Coves: Beehive-shaped collaborative areas where children and families can team up together for a group activity led by an Info Guide, work on group projects

Patrons take advantage of some of the over 300 computer terminals in the new facility. ►

for school using library-issued laptops, or play CurveWorld, the library's interactive computer game for ages 6-18 that builds information literacy skills

❑ Info Vortex: A huge cyclone-shaped screen monitored by library personnel that showcases digital media created by young library patrons

❑ Tech Lab: A circular area lined with computers that makes it easy for an Info Guide to teach new technology skills to a group of interested school-age children (during my visits, I noticed that a group of children were led by an Info Guide as they programmed a robot to obey their commands)

❑ Research Central: Info Guides help school-age children navigate the library's online catalog, databases, reference books, print collections, and the Internet in an open computer lab area

❑ The Arena: A teen-oriented area with a plasma screen TV that showcases students' digital creations and a conference table around which discussions may take place

❑ The Think Tank: A glass-walled study room with a huge table and two wipe-off walls that tweens and teens can use to brainstorm ideas and complete projects together

**J**ust the facts, please. The adult nonfiction collections are located on floors 3 through 6. Logically organized, the Dewey Decimal call numbers increase as the floor numbers increase, and call numbers for each floor are labeled above the escalator exit points. Each of these floors has a prominent information desk located directly in front of the escalator exit area. Copiers and printers are also available on each floor. Those working at the information desks are there to answer questions from the public, so visitors should not hes-

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**LIBRARY LEADERS** will never know how people feel about the new Central Library if they do not share their opinion by signing the guest book and, more importantly, by filling out a comment card located near the information desks and brochure stands.

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itate to ask for help. Librarians should be glad to assist visitors in locating an item on the shelf, narrowing or broadening their search terms to retrieve better results with the online catalog, or helping them answer any reference question they may have. Questions can be about anything at all. From how to change the spark plugs on a 1996 Toyota Camry to locating a place to enroll in a Spanish language class on an upcoming vacation to Escazu, Costa Rica, library staff are there to help visitors find what they seek.

(For more on the library's organization system, see the version of this story on the Urban Times website, [www.brookspublications.com](http://www.brookspublications.com). Click on "News.")

**L**ocal yokels. Floor 6 houses the Indianapolis Special Collections Room. Local history items such as World War I posters, materials focusing on Indianapolis people, places, and businesses, signed first-edition fiction from authors like Kurt Vonnegut and Booth Tarkington, and recordings of James Whitcomb Riley reading his poetry are carefully preserved here.

Not only is the view of the city spectacular, but the room is full of amazing gems excavated from the basement of the 1917 Cret building and brought out into the light for the public to enjoy. Most of the collection is closed off in a temperature-controlled room, but glass windows allow patrons to view the collection from the adjacent reading room where many items are on display in cases. Visitors cannot check out local history items, but most can be copied. Staff members at the information desk on the sixth floor assist patrons with research and pull relevant resources upon request.

**R**ents for events, seating for meetings. Whether patrons are looking to bring 35 colleagues to Indianapolis for a business meeting or wishing to find a location that could

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accommodate a guest list of up to 500 people for a formal event, the Central Library should be on everyone's list of Downtown venues to check out. Spaces of all types, shapes and sizes are available inside and outside of the building. The 329-seat Clowes Auditorium is still under construction, but other meeting areas are ready and available for use. Catering company FLIK has an exclusive arrangement with the Central Library to offer international and themed dishes for events and is also able to create custom menus for clients.

**The bottom line.** Public libraries exist to serve the information needs of the populace. To determine whether my positive viewpoint of the new library was shared by my fellow patrons, I took the liberty of reading through the library's guest book located on the sixth floor in the Indianapolis Special Collections Room. The most negative comment I read there was the simple word "Finally" from only a handful of patrons – referring, of course, to the many delays that plagued the construction phase of this project. One patron noted that she preferred the traditional architecture of the Cret building over the modern look of the new facility, but most of what I read sounded more like this:

- "Beautiful!"
- "Proud to be a Hoosier!"
- "Worth every penny."
- "When can I move in?"
- "I like the Curious George books."

**Keeping it real.** It was Lady Bird Johnson who so eloquently observed that "no place in any community is so totally democratic as the town library. The only entrance requirement is interest."

After years of hype surrounding the Central Library building project, most Indianapolis residents are more than interested in exploring the new facility. As people do, they should remember that the library staff works for them, and that IMCPL will never know how they feel about the new Central Library if they do not share their opinion by signing the guest book and, more importantly, by filling out a comment card located near the information desks and brochure stands.

I strongly encourage visitors to let library administrators know their thoughts about the new facility's look, feel, staff, collections, programs and services. By being honest in our praise and constructive in our criticism, we can ensure that the Central Library becomes not just a key stop on our city's architectural tours, but a vital part of the culture and lives of Downtown residents. ■