
Elmhurst Public Library completes renovation of children's department

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🕒 June 14, 2018

[ELMHURST](#) – Children have a newly renovated Kids' Library at the Elmhurst Public Library where they can read and relax, just in time for the summer reading program.



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Library Director Mary Beth Harper said conceptualizing and planning for the renovation began about four years ago, and construction began in November 2017.

"Here we are, come to fruition," Harper said June 6, two weeks after the majority of the project had been completed.



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The newly renovated space includes a variety of features, such as a computer lab, bigger story time room with better lighting, larger early literacy play area and designated space for middle-school students.

"We noticed [the middle-school students] trying to sneak into the teen area, so they needed a designated space," said Rita Perona, head of marketing for the library.

The library was able to keep the department open during the construction process, which was done in phases.



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The Learning Garden, which was completed first, provides an early literacy space for babies through preschoolers. The area includes a puppet stage, train table, play kitchenette, face-out shelving and furniture with wide seating, promoting the interaction of a parent or guardian reading to his or her child.

"It's been very busy. ... The books are always all over the floor, which is great because you know people are poring through them," Kids' Library Head Sharon Karpiel said.

Face-out shelving, which arranges the books so the cover of the book faces the reader looking through the stack, helps young children explore the choice of reading materials.



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Harper said the layout of the newly renovated library relates to its mission in terms of enabling connections between patrons.

"Connecting in libraries is huge right now, and that really is how libraries are kind of restructuring themselves. We're actually seeing collections decreasing, not drastically, but they're decreasing to make more room for spaces, so that people can connect, so that people can create together, because it's that collaborative connecting that I think our community is really desiring," Harper said.

She added children now have more space to explore, play games and read together, and the preschool area gives caregivers and children more opportunities to connect as well with the space.

Perona said while the collections are decreasing, the programming is dramatically increasing. "It's a different way of learning," she said.



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Perona added she thinks social media coverage of the week-by-week progress on the renovation helped fuel community enthusiasm and acceptance for the project.

"I think they liked being able to see kind of what the action was and feel like they were part of it," she said.

Karpiel said patrons who asked why the renovation was needed would agree with staff after they explained the reasoning.

"They knew what we needed here," she said.

Harper added she believes it also is the duty of the Elmhurst Public Library to provide patrons with some of the new library trends.

"We're giving them that, and then we're also responding to what we're seeing here," she said.



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The library used the services of Product Architect + Design of Chicago and Pathmann Construction Management of Hawthorn Woods for the project. The roughly \$1.4 million renovation was funded through reserves, Harper said. Much of the cost came from refurnishing the space with new furniture and carpeting, she said.

"I think that our kids' department here with Sharon leading the way really did a wonderful job of knowing, again, what this community was looking for because they [the staff] are here every day and they are so ... attuned to what their patrons are doing, and then also exploring other libraries, finding out what's out there and being very firm about what they wanted for here," Harper said.