

OCEANSIDE

Overhaul starts new chapter for library

BY RAY HUARD

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"Awesome" was how library fan Suzanne Williams described ongoing renovation work at Oceanside's Civic Center Library.

"The whole thing is going to be mind-blowing," said Williams, who heads Friends of the Oceanside Library. "It's going to be beyond beautiful."

The 21-year-old library will have an entirely new feel when it reopens March 2 after a three-month makeover meant to improve efficiency and provide more space for patrons. The revamp includes new study rooms for students, a computer training center and an expanded teen room, said library director Deborah Polich.

"We're eager to have to public see all the changes," Polich said. "It's been a huge job. Everyone is so happy with the progress, so happy to see it take shape."

Gone will be the stuffiness that characterized traditional libraries with librarians stationed behind desks or counters separating them from patrons.

Instead, the renovated library is designed to function more like a bookstore, with an emphasis on customer service and workers circulating among patrons to help them find what they want or maybe explore something new, said renovation architect David Pfeifer of domusstudio architecture of San Diego.

"It's almost a retail type of approach, although they're not selling anything," Pfeifer said. "It's less institutional, less formal and more interactive. It's definitely a trend that is seen in almost all public libraries."

Workers last week were busy laying the last of the new carpeting, repainting interior walls in the bold blue-and-white colors that mark the city Civic Center complex and installing a wider front door and new main stairway to the second floor.

The renovation has been in the works since 2005, when the City Council approved a library strategic plan.

It took an additional five years for library supporters to cobble together the money to avoid tapping the city's beleaguered general fund, which has faced ongoing deficits for the past three years as officials scrambled to cover the city's day-to-day operating costs.

In all, the city spent \$533,300 on the renovation — money that came from the city's capital improvement budget and can't be used to pay down the general fund shortfall.

The Friends of the Oceanside Library and the Oceanside Public Library Foundation kicked in an additional \$120,000 for furnishings, a coffee bar and a mural, Polich said.

The renovation is on budget and on time, Polich said.

Structurally, architect Pfeifer said, his goal was to "preserve the integrity" of the overall design of the library so it would continue to fit in with the rest of the Civic Center while making enough changes in the interior layout to make it more functional.

The most striking change is a wide-open atrium just inside the front door, with the main staircase that leads to the second floor moved to the side of the room. It had been in the middle.

Instead of the stairway, a circular service desk will be at the center of the atrium, with books on display on smaller tables around the main service desk.

The books will be arranged in tiered displays, like a wedding cake, Pfeifer said.

The idea is to present books, videos and other material thematically.

For instance, Pfeifer said the library could have a World War II theme mixing fiction and nonfiction books and videos in the same section so patrons could explore the topic



Renovation work is nearly complete on Oceanside's downtown Civic Center Library, which is scheduled to reopen March 2. Right, MW Construction employee Steven Riensche installs a door for the new training room at the library.

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DAVID PFEIFER

domusstudio architecture of San Diego

from a variety of angles, Pfeifer said.

Besides creating an open atrium, an expanded teen room has been added to the west side of the first floor of the library and will include computer stations and study areas, Polich said.

To Williams, the Friends' president, that's a big plus, because she said the number of young readers drawn to the library has increased dramatically over the past few years.

In the past, "You'd hardly ever see a teenager there," Williams said. "Now, there's over 200 a day."

The library makeover also is apparent on the second floor, where the children's room is getting a new look, with bookcases arranged at angles so the people in the aisles are within sight of a service desk should they need help finding something.

A play area in the northeast corner of the room also will be marked with an ocean-theme mural by Julia

Anthony, Polich said.

Work on the mural won't start until the library reopens, so children can watch Anthony as she paints.

"She's going to be an artist in residence for several months," Polich said.

The second floor also is home to a new technology center and three study rooms.

Polich said she was able to stretch the renovation budget by acquiring bookshelves from a bookstore that went out of business at a fraction of what it would have cost to buy new ones.

New, the shelves would have cost about \$87,000, but Polich said she was able

to get the used shelves for about \$8,000.

The savings went to replace some of the library's furniture, which was well worn from more than 20 years of heavy use.

About 1,000 people come to the library every day, Polich said.

Just getting ready for the renovation was a monumental task for library workers, who moved 1,900 books, CDs, video discs and other material from the shelves into storage and back onto the shelves, Polich said.

The finished product was well worth the work and the waiting, Williams said.