

Features Of New Library Make It Leader Of Design

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Construction of the new Bethlehem Public Library is on schedule for dedication in early October with the entire City Center project.

Painters are busy painting the exterior columns and windows, plasterers are working on the colonnade ceilings, and glaziers are completing the glass installation, while on the interior, workers are installing flooring materials, plaster walls, acoustical ceilings and ceiling light fixtures.

Furnishing contracts have been awarded and this phase of the work is in progress so that the Library will be complete and operational at the time of dedication. Plans have been formulated to handle the logistics problems attendant to the move from the present Library on Market Street to the new building.

A new Public Library for Bethlehem will soon be a reality.

A visitor to the new Library will be first impressed by its size — 44,000 square feet — almost six times the size of the former Bethlehem Steel Co. Band Hall which has served as quarters for the Library since 1924.

The new Library will easily accommodate 200,000 books with the potential of adding more in the expansion stack space on the ground floor.

Designed to make the most of a beautiful and spacious site, the Library enhances the City Center as well as benefiting from it.

The site created the opportunity for the Library to share its activities with its surrounding. The Library exterior walls are mostly glass permitting a visual tie between interior and exterior space. During the day the Library spaces are enhanced and expanded by the adjacent outdoor areas, while at night the Library will act as magnet by exposing its activities to view. It will be visually evident at all times that the building is for people and books.

The glass areas are protected on all sides by a 15 foot-wide colonnade supported by tapered, four-part steel columns which shield the glass areas from the sun and provide a covered passageway to the main entrance for the pedestrian coming from any direction.

The exterior of the Library has an identity all of its own while using the same natural basic materials used throughout the City Center: granite, steel, glass, and South Mountain native stone.

In contrast to the City Center office buildings which are introspective by function and articulated to reflect the typical small office module, the Library is open, inviting and larger in scale to reflect the expanse of its large public areas.

Humanizing

The addition of the Library brings a basic community function and hence community life into the City Center. A library attracts people from all walks of life and all ages: children, students, adults, and senior citizens. The Library is thus the humanizing influence within the City Center, bringing to it the essential ingredient necessary to make the Center a vibrant part of the community: the public.

In return the Library reaps benefits from the City Center it would not have achieved by itself — a 13 acre landscaped site and a parking garage capable of housing 180 cars.

During the weekday work hours a reasonable proportion of these spaces are available for Library use while the rest of the spaces are assigned for other City functions. However, during the peak periods of Library use — which are evenings and Saturdays — the greater proportion of the spaces are available for Library patrons.

In addition there is expansion parking around the Library on the perimeter streets and short term parking spaces on Church Street immediately adjacent to the Library. The Library shares its landscaped setting with the City Center and in return utilizes building services delivered from the main government building: heat and hot water, electrical services and air conditioning.

Once in operation there is no reason why the Library cannot share other services such as janitorial and custodial care. With the addition of the Library the City Center has truly become a cooperative public venture.

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In contrast to the present Library which has seven levels in two buildings, the new Library is a simple, basically square, three story building consisting of a ground floor at the parking garage level, a main or first floor at the plaza level, and a second floor above the plaza level.

The ground floor is directly related to the parking garage and service areas of the Center. Upon entering the parking garage a library visitor can park his car under cover, enter the ground floor entrance to the Library and take an elevator or walk one flight of stairs to the main floor.

Located on the ground floor are the bookmobile service areas, mimeograph and display preparation center, staff lockers and lounge, and a seventy-five seat general meeting room that can be used by the public for scheduled events.

The main or first floor of the Library houses the primary public areas of the Library: adult and reference reading areas, general stacks, children's room, and the Bethlehem Room which contains the historical collection.

The main floor is at the main plaza level as are the public areas in the other Center buildings: Treasurer's Office in the City Government Building, Permit Offices in the Public Safety Building, and Council Chamber in the Town Hall.

The second floor of the Library is used for the closed stack areas, book processing department and the administrative staff offices. Also included on this floor is the Library board room and a second meeting room capable of holding seventy-five people.

Use of the Library has been designed to be a family affair. The children's room is located on the main floor with the other public areas and is not tucked away in the basement. As a child matures, adult books are only a step away when he is ready for them.

Rather than create a series of autonomous rooms, the attempt has been to develop interrelated and interdependent spaces so that the library user is gradually exposed to all that the library has to offer, and so that the younger reader is challenged to explore the library's potentialities.

Within this framework of flexible arrangement, great emphasis was placed on providing the three "C's" which evolved during the conceptual design stage: comfort, convenience, control.

It was felt that the Library should be comfortable for both reader and staff. Instead of dumping personal belongings on a chair it is possible to place them in a coin return locker. There are soft chairs for lounging, straight chairs for working at tables, and lightweight chairs for moving about.

The Library has a record listening area, study carrels for serious study, and a story-telling area for children.

Convenience was felt to be an essential design goal. There is one general stack area on one level only, one reference area and one card catalog area all interrelated in relation to projected traffic patterns.

Each major reading area is related to a staff desk. Each key staff desk is connected by an intercom system. All three levels are served by a passenger elevator, a booklift dumbwaiter, a public stairway, and a staff stairway. Provisions have been made for a future freight elevator. Design emphasis has been given to the movement of both people and books.

One advantage of the openness of the Library plan is that of easy control. The main charging desk serves both the children's Library and the adult Library. Located adjacent to the main entrance, the main desk commands a good view of the entire first floor of the Library and serves as the traffic center for the 1,000 to 2,400 books that leave the Library daily.

The entire main floor of the Library is carpeted for sound control, ease of maintenance, and that intangible under-foot quality which connotes that a Library is a place for quiet activity.

By de-emphasizing the furnishings it is the books which are used for color and interest. The books are housed in charcoal-black steel stacks with butternut wood end-panels which match the wood table tops in the reference and reading areas.

Place For Art

By contrast, the Children's Room will feature brighter colors and smaller scale furniture, while the Bethlehem Room will have wood stacks and walnut paneling to convey a sense of restful security.

Art will be used in the Library as elsewhere throughout the Center to represent the best of both traditional and contemporary artistic expression. The sixty-foot high sculpture by Joseph Greenberg, located on the plaza and

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constructed of welded steel, is said to represent the fusion and integration of the nationalities comprising our citizenry.

The wall sculpture by Joseph Cantieni in the Library stair hall is intended to represent three interconnected trees of knowledge beginning in the basement with the beginnings of life and cumulating at the top with man's exploration of space.

In contrast to the rough welded reinforcing bars of weathering steel in the exterior Greenberg sculpture, the playful Cantieni wall sculpture will feature bright metals, polychrome, and colorful plastic forms.

And don't be too surprised in walking through the Library to find a simple woodcut here, and etching there, and a colored lithograph elsewhere. There will be ample room for additional works of art as the City's collection grows.

Now that the Library is reaching completion it is almost impossible to visualize the City Center without it. It is the cornerstone of the composition and the balance in both mass and function to the taller government buildings on the east side of the plaza.

It has become a reality only because the citizens of Bethlehem wanted it badly enough to personally subscribe to pay over one-third of its cost. An enlightened City Government with the power of veto resting in either political party chose to respond to this need by providing one-third of the cost from tax monies and by securing the balance needed through State and Federal funds.

All that remains is for the first bright-eyed youngster to walk through the main entrance door on Oct. 11 and officially open the Library that the citizens of Bethlehem made possible.