



“Featured Building” newsletter

IFLA Standing Committee on Library Buildings and Equipment
www.ifla.org/VII/s20/index.htm

Name of library: Fayetteville Public Library (Building name is Blair Library)

Location (city / state / country): Fayetteville, Arkansas USA

Year completed: Opened in October 2004; final completion spring 2006

Gross building area: 88,754 square feet (+87,929 square foot parking garage)

Planned collection capacity (books, nonprint, other): 330,000 items

Number of computer stations for library users: 100

Number of reader seats: 317 (+36 outdoor seats)

Other key design features: Fireplace room named for Roberta Fulbright, business woman, journalist and mother of Senator J. William Fulbright; large outdoor terrace overlooking mountains; indoor /outdoor café; U.S. Green Building Council LEED-Silver certified; green roof; cork flooring. Design is structured around an organic theme and the natural elements of earth, air, fire, water.

As you consider the entire planning and construction process, what was the greatest challenge (e.g., securing approval and funding, site selection, working with a difficult consulting librarian) and how was it addressed?

All parts of the planning and construction process were challenging. We set incredibly high standards for the project: (1) a transparent and citizen focused design process; (2) a world class facility; (3) 75% support in a public vote for the tax-based funding; (4) a \$6 million endowment goal for our fundraising campaign; (5) paid for in cash, no debt, completed within budget and opened on time. We achieved these goals in addition to revamping and reengineering virtually all of the library’s work processes and technology infrastructure—all by opening day.

Three parts of the process were the most strenuous. First, during the site selection and early design phase we held dozens of public input meetings day and night. That’s when we encountered citizens who were resistant to change, didn’t understand the need for

tripling the size of the library, or used their belief in the imminent obsolescence of libraries as a reason to oppose the project. The challenge here was to create a structure for the community conversation, get acceptance of a set of ground rules for each meeting, welcome and be open to all comments, seek to understand and respond to the meaning behind the words and educate, educate, educate.

Second, impenetrable rock was encountered during the site excavation that threatened to use up all our contingency funds. This was partially resolved through the use of blasting—something we had told neighbors of the new library that we would not do. It took a lot of community relations building, but we did it. We also successfully mediated this oversight with the geotechnical firm.

Finally, the six months prior to moving into the new library and the twelve months following the opening were exhausting. One challenge was to resolve all outstanding construction issues without having the taxpayers bear the cost. For instance, the finish on the cork flooring was not acceptable to the library. Because at the start of the construction the stakeholders had pledged to be respectful, work as a team and value each other throughout the entire process, the groundwork had been laid for a productive conversation that resulted in a solution that met our needs and was paid for by the parties responsible. The values have to be articulated right at the start. Everyone has to buy in and live them because it's a long relationship.

What was the greatest *design* challenge and how was it resolved?

The entrance and lobby sequence was the most challenging. The pre-funding design that was featured on the election ads was not, in the end, the design that was built. The library was to be an important building for our fast growing community of 70,000 people, yet the entrance and the entrance sequence didn't stand up to expectations even though its hillside downtown location held the promise of something really spectacular. After the funding was approved, the architect went back to the "table" and, literally, on the back of a paper napkin (how unsustainable!) resolved the issue.

The result was a strong corner entrance facing toward the historical center of our downtown and a café with seating inside and outside the entrance. Visitors walk in the door and have a sense of "wow." The curvaceous lines of the lobby literally draw you in with stream-like terrazzo flooring anchored by a circle of a welcome desk and, in the distance, a promise of a spectacular view. When Senator Hillary Clinton visited in 2006 to see the building that was named for her late best friend, Diane Blair, she walked through the doors and immediately saw and expressed the "wow" factor.

What feature(s) works particularly well in the building?

One wing of our building ends in a giant ellipse shape that looks out to the mountains. Customers are drawn to these elliptical spaces and seek them out. Another thing we hear from customers is they like the diversity of seating areas—there are many different types of seating environments—and seek out their favorite niches. Also, the lobby achieved the "grand central station" effect that was desired. There is not enough room here to list all the features that work well.

Based on the building's use, what design element(s) would you change?

I would enlarge the main meeting room by at least thirty percent to 300 person capacity plus double the size of the meeting room kitchen and chair storage. I would double the size of the young adult area and double the number of PCs in that area. And, finally, I would decrease the size of the circulation desk by 50% because 70% of all items are now being self-checked.

How has the community responded?

The new library has been overwhelming received by the community. This is reflected in the continued double digit increases in use and positive media attention. It is considered a "crown jewel" of the community. Residents regularly bring out-of-town visitors in to show off their library; local business and institutions show off the library to potential job recruits; libraries from around the country come to tour and the library is regularly featured in local economic development marketing materials and videos. Fayetteville Public Library's Blair Library has opened the community's eyes to what a library can and should be.