

Building for the Future: A Continuing Process

Carol Derner
Assistant Director
Lake County Public Library
Merrillville, IN

In 1984 Lake County Public Library will celebrate its 25th birthday. Most of those years were spent building or planning to build. The system began with five small buildings, three rented facilities, two trailers, one bookmobile and 60,000 books serving a population of 113,033. Today there are thirteen branches and a Central Library serving 205,000 persons with a collection of over 504,000 volumes.

The early building program was reported in the September 1970 issue of *Focus on Indiana Libraries*.¹ This article explains the planning for the building program which formally began in 1976 and resulted in additions of 9,752 square feet to the Munster Branch, 6,100 square feet to the Hobart Branch, and 67,000 square feet to the Central Library.

Planning for the Munster Branch and Central Library additions began when the libraries were built. Provisions were made at that time for expansion depending upon growth and demand for services. The branches were completed in 1968 and the Central Library (originally called Reference Library—Administration Center) opened in 1970.

The Central Library of 28,850 square feet opened with a collection of 32,071 books in 1970. Capacity was 41,000 volumes. By 1976 the collection had grown to 117,544 volumes. Shelving had been added and rearranged many times to accommodate the rapidly growing collection and services. Quiet lounge areas gave way to shelving and user space was very cramped.

In 1973 land was purchased for an addition to the Central Library. The Independence Hill Branch was closed in 1974, as the branch was located within a mile of the Central Library. With the closing of the branch, the Central Library Children's Services area was expanded and active programming began. In 1975 the name was changed from Reference Library to Central Library to reflect a full service library. An annex building of 5,000 square feet was constructed to relieve space problems in the Central Library. Public Relations, Graphic Arts, Talking Book Services, supplies and maintenance operations were moved to this building. Space formerly housing those functions was allocated to a reference work room, relocation of data processing, storage of special collections, and an increased audio-visual area.

In September 1976, the Board's Plan and Development, and Building and Site Committees recommended a plan of action to the entire board. Staff was to develop a building program statement for the addition to the Central Library to include an automated circulation system. Addition to Central Library, Munster and Hobart branches, land acquisition and repairs to older branches were to be financed through a bond issue and a library leasing corporation.

Staff participation was encouraged in developing the building program statement. The Chief of Public Services, Chief of Technical Services, Adult Services Coordinator, and Children's Services Coordinator worked closely with the Assistant Director in developing the program statement, with Director Paul Bartolini guiding and critiquing the drafts. Each supervisor of an area was asked for program statement input giving objectives, function, relationship to other units, space requirements, work space needs, personnel and equipment requirements. Supervisors brainstormed with their staff members to get as many ideas as possible. Staff members working in the departments had many constructive ideas to share.

The decision was that the Central Library of the library system would serve the people as follows:

- o Provide major information services.
- o Provide specialized subject materials and services.
- o Reinforce the services and collections in the branches.
- o Serve as Administrative Center.

Our experience in the Central Library indicated that the public needs considerable professional and other staff help and services on an individual and group basis. We need large collections of reference, research and non-circulating material as well as library materials for users to take home. Citizens willingly come to this location from considerable distances because staff is helpful, hours of service are long, and collections are broad and deep.

Neither the Central Library public service staff or its collection

for the public was adequate to meet the foregoing demands. Space was lacking to seat users and house the present collection. The collection had grown from principally books to include a large periodical and newspaper collection, microfilms, records, films, framed art, audio and video cassettes, business services and extensive pamphlet files. New technology called for new space requirements. The Audio-Visual Department was inadequate to present needs. In a space of 740 square feet it served a warehouse function only, with no space for listening, viewing, or production. The Children's Department was crowded into one corner of the adult area. Additional meeting rooms were necessary for new services the library needed to provide in continuing education and to promote the significance of the library as a cultural center. The Central Library had one meeting room with seating for 100. This room was used 728 times in 1976 by 28,835 persons. Many county-wide organizations found the site a central location for meetings and were disappointed when they could not reserve space. The parking area had space for 130 vehicles, which was not enough for the demand created in part by lack of public transportation.

In addition to its own population, the Central Library served the reference and in-depth needs of the Crown Point Center Library and Lowell Library districts by contract. The Central Library offered interlibrary loan (ILL) and reference referral service to the Northwest Indiana Area Library Services Authority (NIALSA) serving a seven county area. The Central Library also served as a subregional center providing services to the blind and physically handicapped in a five county area.

The 1990 projected population figure for the service area of Lake County Public Library was 253,400. This projection was used to calculate space needs for the future.

A general requirement was for a flexible, expandable building in which service for the increasing public needs could be met with a staff not greatly expanded from that needed for the present building. The environment should be exciting and inviting to encourage extensive use of the library. Energy efficiency for the life of the building was a high priority.

The building program statement was completed in December 1976. It was decided not to departmentalize subject areas but to combine all circulating print materials in a general library area. This area would consist of General Library Area, Lobby/Information, Periodical and Microform Area and workroom, Quiet Study Rooms, and Typing Room. Other areas were Reference Services, Media and Fine Arts, Children's Library, Circulation Services, Administration Center, and Ancillary Services. Reference Services would include the Reference Area, Work Area, NIALSA/ILL Area and Special Col-

lections. Media and Fine Arts included the Media and Fine Arts Area, Workroom, Film and Video Studio, Preview Room and Public Meeting Rooms. The Children's Library included public area, program room, workrooms, and office space. Circulation Services included public area and workroom space. The Administration Center included Library Board Room, Director's office, Assistant Director's office, Personnel Coordinator's office, Comptroller's office, Public Relations office, Administrative Staff offices, and Reception Area. Ancillary Services included Technical Services, Shipping, Receiving and Storage Areas. Information sheets were developed for each area giving function, location and characteristics, and space requirements which included equipment needed.

The first draft of the program called for an addition of 128,000 square feet. After studying preliminary costs, the Board elected to build a smaller addition and the program was cut to an addition of 67,260 square feet combined with the present square footage of 28,850 for a total of 96,110 square feet. With much agonizing, areas were cut and combined to reach the new target. A fixed, seated auditorium, the children's program room, quiet reading areas, and some public seating were eliminated. Administrative offices would remain in present quarters.

In 1977 a Construction Manager, Architect, and Financial Consultant were hired. The Board approved a Capital Improvement Program of \$8,850,000 for expansion of Hobart and Munster Branches, for purchase of additional land, and for expansion of the Central Library. Some \$5,600,000 was raised by a General Obligation Bond and \$3,250,000 through a Library Leasing Corporation. A fact sheet to explain the building program was prepared to hand out to patrons. Signatures were obtained on petitions throughout the system, with 2583 signatures authorized by the auditor.

While contracts were negotiated and funding obtained, staff members continued to plan. In the spring of 1977 five senior staff members visited recently completed Indiana libraries to observe building features and equipment which we would like to suggest to our architect. We visited Fort Wayne Public Library, Bracken Library at Ball State University, Morrisson-Reeves Library in Richmond, Bartholomew County Library, and the Central Library and Nora Branch of the Indianapolis-Marion County Public Library.

These staff members worked closely with the architect's design team in translating the program into room configurations. The room configurations were incorporated into several design schemes for Board approval. A compact, metal-skinned, three-story square building was approved. The new building would be connected by a two-level link to the present building.

The building is divided into three central areas: the middle level

includes circulation services, reference services, periodicals department, two quiet study rooms, typing room, special collections, and supporting workrooms. The upper level includes the general circulating collection. The lower level includes the Media Services and the Children's Department separated by meeting rooms.

During the planning for the Media Services, a consultant was hired to work with staff to insure that future technology could be accommodated. The Media area includes listening and viewing stations, a production studio, a control room from which media can be distributed throughout the building and a large workroom. A gallery area provides space for displaying circulating framed art prints or private showings and exhibits.

The meeting room seats 200 and can be divided to accommodate up to four groups meeting at the same time. The room is heavily booked by community groups and for library programs.

The Children's Room was placed next to the meeting room for ease of conducting programs. The reading area is divided by furniture to accommodate preschoolers and older children.

A snack area in the lower link shares vending machines with the staff. This area is occupied throughout the day by mothers of preschoolers, businessmen, and students. Many of our patrons come to spend the day and appreciate the opportunity to brown bag or obtain light refreshments.

As the furnishings were going to be bid as part of the total bid package, decisions on specifics had to be made early. Staff members worked closely with the designers on design of the service desks. One central ready reference desk was to be located prominently on the main entrance level of the building. The desk, accommodating four librarians, provides a hub of activity for serving patron information needs. Patrons then scatter throughout the building for quiet work. Exterior and interior signage planned to direct patrons throughout the building was coordinated with the interior planning. Plans for the automated circulation system were incomplete as the building was bid. However, outlets and conduit were included throughout the building for future installation of terminals for staff and patron use. We were also in the process of converting from a book catalog to a COM catalog which required proper placement and wiring.

The groundbreaking was held on July 12, 1979, and staff and patrons eagerly watched construction proceed around them. The building opened for business in March 1981. A wind in early April ripped 50 feet of the wall off the building, and unfortunately, repair construction is still underway at this time. Patrons are using the building and its services in increasing numbers and will soon enjoy it without construction inconveniences.

The building has proven to be flexible, as one department has been moved successfully due to changing technology and new service needs. The Indiana Collection was moved to a room formerly occupied by reserves and NIALSA staff. Reserves staff has been replaced by the automated circulation system which was installed in 1982. NIALSA provides their own service in another space rented in the building. The Indiana Collection can be more easily served by the reference staff in the new location. Library buildings must be able to change as quickly as service priorities and we feel our planning has accomplished that goal.

Planning for the branch libraries proceeded along with planning for Central Library. The Branch Heads worked with the Assistant Director on the Building Program Statement which was adopted by the Board in January 1978. We worked with a different architect on these projects and followed many of the same steps in the process.

Munster Branch needs were additional parking, seating for the public, larger meeting room, increased shelving for materials, listening stations, staff work area, periodical storage, local history and quiet study areas. Hobart Branch needs were the same with the additional need to remodel the building to cut utility costs and eliminate leaks. Additional land was acquired for both branches in order to create additions that are fully integrated with the original buildings.

Planning for furnishings was done in a more leisurely fashion, as they were bid separately and later than the construction. Both buildings were recarpeted and new furnishings selected to match the existing.

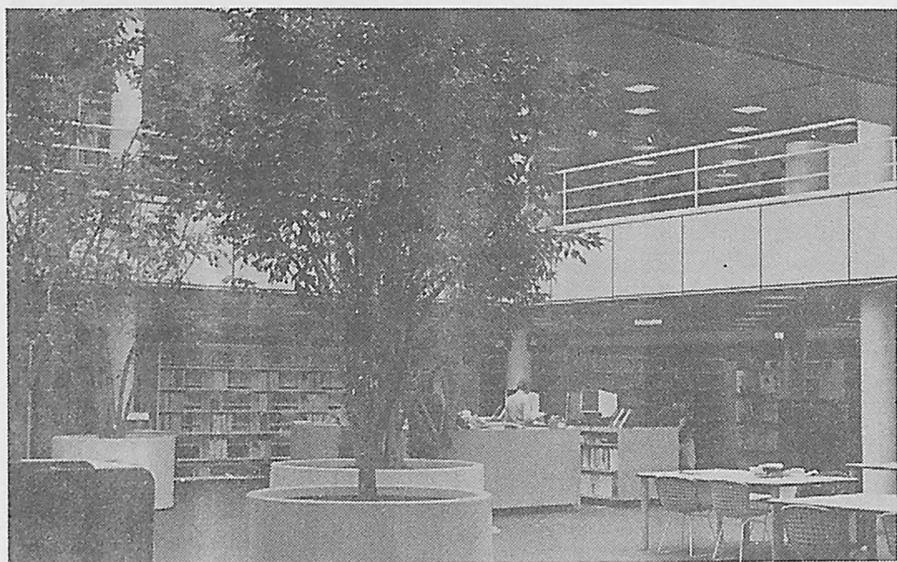
Any building program requires patience and enthusiasm as well as planning. Additions require a double dose of those ingredients. Building is a continuous process. As we complete this program, we are again planning for our next project.

NOTES

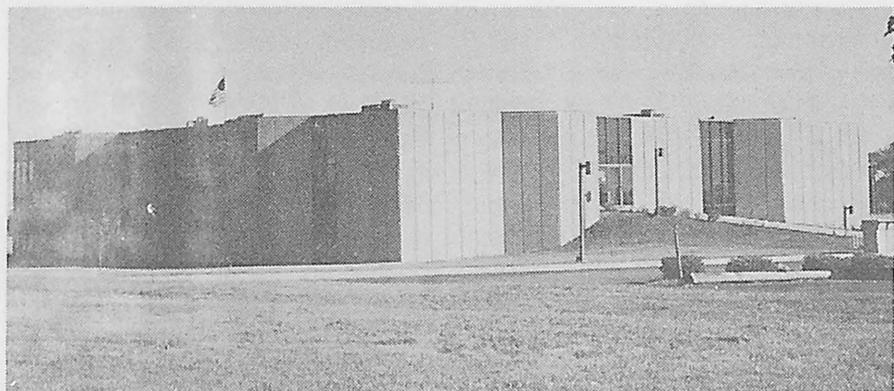
¹ Mary Haner, "Eleven Years and Fifteen New Buildings: A Success Story for Lake County," *Focus on Indiana Libraries* 24 (September 1970):156-157.



Lake County Public Library's upper level.



The reference desk on the middle level.



Lake County Public Library