

A Library for All

When a private developer and a public school district decide to build a joint-use facility, both the community and the students profit

Remember when libraries were synonymous with hushed corners, solemn hallways, and sounds of silence meeting us at every corner? Remember when librarians kept a finger on their lips as a reminder that whispers were an assault on the ears?

You won't hear "ssshhhhhh" in the North Valley Regional Library, located on the Boulder Creek High School campus in Anthem, Ariz.

"We don't try to keep our libraries quiet," says Harry Courtright, director of the Maricopa County Library District. "We have places for people to go if they want a place that's quiet, but the library itself isn't quiet. We tell people it's just the kind of library people in Arizona like."

The North Valley Regional Library serves the communities of New River, Anthem, and Desert Hills. Anthem, a planned community 34 miles north of downtown Phoenix, opened in 1998 and has grown to support a population of 20,000. North Valley is the library district's first joint-use facility.

Today, the 24,000-square-foot facility has the latest in technology and a collection of about 60,000 items, which includes best-sellers, books on CD, and DVDs. The library, which also serves Boulder Creek High School, offers 50 computers for Internet access, e-mail, word processing, and research.

While not unique, the library is a

win-win for the communities it serves and the Deer Valley School District, which approached the library district and developer Del Webb about the joint-use arrangement. It also provides other districts with a road map to use when looking at similar partnerships.

The joint-use advantage

When Del Webb began building Anthem in the mid 1990s, the master plan included a provision to provide a building and land for a library at the site of the community's welcome center. Three years into the construction, however, the developer decided to keep the welcome center. So it could not be used as a library site.

That prompted Kent Davis, Deer Valley's associate superintendent for administrative services, to contact Courtright to discuss the possibility of a joint-use facility. After negotiations, Del Webb agreed to give Maricopa County approximately \$700,000 toward the library's construction.

The library district and Deer Valley signed an intergovernmental agreement that allows the school district to lease the facility for \$1 a year. In return, Deer Valley invested \$350,000 for the opening day collection and continues to pay the library district \$10,000 a year to purchase materials that meet the high school's needs. The school district also maintains the facility and pays for utilities.

For its part of the agreement, the library district furnished and equipped the building. Six Maricopa County librarians staff and stock the facility during the school day and after school hours.

Before the facility was designed, library district staff visited other joint-use facilities and discovered four clues to their future success:

- The library must be separate from the rest of the school.
- It must have separate entrances.
- It needs to be visible from the street and have its own parking.
- School monitors are needed to manage the student/public "rush hour traffic" that begins when school ends at 2:10 p.m.

Architectural and engineering firm DLR Group designed the high school and the library. Boulder Creek is designed around a school-within-a-school "house concept," offering a collegelike atmosphere. The high school buildings are located around a student courtyard, and the more public facilities rotate around the public plaza.

Located near the administration building and school entrance, the library's entrance is arranged for easy public and student access, with both entrances well defined in the front of the school.

The school and library won a citation from the judges in *ASBJ's Learning by Design* contest in 2006. The judges "applauded the facets of the design that encouraged joint use with the community, including the public library on campus."

"It's great how this facility has been recognized by the industry for its merits and how it focuses on the student at every level from the small school concept to community use," says DLR

Group Principal Tom O’Neil. “The facility’s success begins with the architectural backdrop but is truly taken to the next level in its operation.”

A true community approach

Collaborating with the school district, the North Valley Regional Library takes a true community approach. Adult, teen, and children’s programs are offered, and the library has partnerships with the Phoenix Zoo and the Phoenix Suns basketball team. Teens meet monthly at the library’s Starbucks for the Coffee Talk for Teens program, and SAT review classes are held annually.

“We look like a book store,” says Cindy Kolaczynski, the library’s branch manager. “It isn’t your typical school library by any means. Learning is a social activity, so you need to be communicating, making noise.”

Kolaczynski says the library has 50

computers, “which you’d never find in a school library,” and is “totally automated.” More than 50 teens volunteer at the facility during the summer, manning the reading table and distributing prizes to children.

“We have self check and smart check, which is very convenient for students and the public, who are in a hurry,” she says. “The downloadable books, the music, and the DVDs are very popular. We have three study rooms for students and the public. They can use their own laptops in the study room. We have two classrooms in addition to a meeting room. And WiFi is just down the road.”

The library operates as a self-service model—just like a bookstore. “All the stuff is right there,” Kolaczynski says. “You can pick it up and walk out the door. You don’t even have to talk to the staff if you don’t want to.”

Communications are a key element of the library’s operations. Programs are listed in a daily bulletin published by the high school, and the library district has worked with the school’s Key Club and Spanish Club on communitywide programs. A back-to-school fashion show involved local merchants, students, and parents.

The facility has been so successful that Maricopa County built another joint-use library in Gilbert. And from school officials to library staff, everyone is convinced that joint use is the way to go.

“North Valley is a prototype of what we’re doing in all our facilities,” Courtright says. “The layout is almost a duplicate of this. Everything’s being built on this pattern.” ■

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