

by: Matt Hooke (mhooke@chespub.com)

NORTHEAST — After a dozen scissors cut a blue ribbon, the Cecil County Public Library celebrated the opening of their new North East branch on Saturday, April 24. The 43,000 square foot facility on 485 Mauldin Avenue will serve as the new library headquarters, with a 70,000 item collection. The library is designed to be a hub for the entire county, not just North East.

“This space, especially the spaces that we’ve designed for children, is really going to serve families throughout the entire county,” said Cecil County Public Library Director Morgan Miller. “We have the sorts of spaces and learning features here that families would have to drive to Philly or Baltimore to go to, and instead, we will be able to bring that right here to the library.”

The building, with a 33,000 square foot library and a 10,000 square foot headquarters, replaces the previous North East location, a mere 2,800 square foot building a few minutes from Main Street.

The library is located within a shopping center, providing a large amount of parking as well as easy access from I-95, while also allowing parents to drop their kids off at the library before going on other shopping errands.

The library features large windows providing ample natural light. Jeff Hoover of Trappe Architects, the designers of the new library, said the building has a large east west axis to maximize sunlight even more. The second story of the building is pulled back to allow for more light to reach the first floor, while drawing occupants’ eyes to the facilities on the second floor. The design, coupled with the building’s high ceiling, creates a sense of openness and space as you walk in.

Chuck Wray, an architect from design firm Quinn Evans, said the blue of the walls and ceiling references North East’s coastal location.

The back of the building features a green space centered around a waterfall fixture next to a staircase. The fixture’s running water helps ensure that noise from traffic does not bleed into the building from the parking lot and roads outside.

The second floor, partially funded by the Friends Foundation of the Cecil

County Library's "Raising the 21st Century Child" campaign, features a wide variety of learning opportunities. The children's room features the Our Town Early Literacy Center modeled after buildings in and around North East. The area features several large wooden buildings for children to play in, including a facsimile of Turkey Point Lighthouse, along with a puppet theatre and several other safe, fun options.

"There are so many kids in this community, who need to hear from the adults in it that they're worth doing this for," said Miller. "That changes the way they see themselves and their future."

CCPL offers several early learning kits so children can learn about science from a young age. These kits include small hands-on stations within the library itself, such as the set of miniature circuits that encourage kids to learn about the basics of electricity.

"It's not just a library as a place for books, but as a real early learning environment," said Hoover. "Here's [Here there is?] lots of hands-on learning, as well as book learning."

The teen area across from the children's center is more of a hangout space. Books and graphic novels oriented for young adults line the wall. The section is also stocked with far more than books. Along with a row of computers, there's a giant screen tv, that can be used to work on school assignments like a PowerPoint, or even just for having fun with the Nintendo Switch console attached to it.

"The opportunity for family engagement is really high in this space," said assistant branch manager Catherine Zang.

The first floor primarily features the main book collection. But elsewhere on the first floor are the areas CCPL tailored for small business owners, which have become more valuable after many jobs shifted to remote work during the pandemic.

These resources include conference rooms and areas for zoom meetings as well as the Digital Media Lab, each of which are accessible to the public. The Lab, based on discussions with business owners, features computers outfitted with graphics design and editing programs.

"The library is the best method of learning, especially for poorer communities who lack access to technology" said donor Joseph Gwiazdowski.

The new branch is open Monday — Friday: 9 a.m. — 6 p.m. and Saturday: 9 a.m. — 5 p.m.