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A New Chapter in North Royalton

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By Jeanne Bluffstone | Photos by Roger Mastroianni

On August 3, the new 30,000-square-foot North Royalton Branch of the Cuyahoga County Public Library officially opened its doors to the public. The branch's opening was celebrated during an open house, which drew residents from the area and throughout the county.

Replacing an outdated facility on State Road, the \$11.7 million branch at 5071 Wallings Road is part of a Cuyahoga County Public Library (CCPL) master plan for building nine new branch libraries and renovating nine others. The overall effort seeks to reduce long-term operating costs across all locations.

While there are some similarities among the branches, the library's plan is also to work with different architects and construction teams on each project, so each branch has features that are unique to that branch and its patrons.

"We definitely wanted each branch to have its own personality, and although we have standards that must be met, we did want the branches to look different," says Tracy Strobel, Cuyahoga County Public Library Deputy Director. "We also wanted to drive economic development across the county, so the teams are local."

The North Royalton Branch Library is adjacent to the YMCA, which also fits into the library's objectives. Several branches have been built on sites adjacent to municipal buildings.

"We like our libraries to be on a campus with another public entity that is similar to us," says Strobel. "It's ideal to be partnered with other civic agencies whenever possible."

Environment included in the design

Strategically designed to coexist with its environment, the North Royalton branch has two distinct points of view. The first is the entrance, which faces west, and the branch's 120-space parking lot. The entrance has a glass-enclosed vestibule and cast stone façade with

SHAPING UP Serving as a focal point in the center of the library is a 30-foot-diameter skylight (top), which is constructed around a frame of reinforced steel and drywall (bottom).

metal panels, which relate to the surrounding commercial area.

“We didn’t want the branch to be an all-glass building and since it faces the commercial area, there is more of a civic presence at the front,” says Jason Nolde, partner with Richard Fleischman Partners + Architects. “Since we wanted the building to be reminiscent of the commercial area, we used cast stone and glass, with metal paneling up above toward the mechanical equipment area.”

The mechanical equipment is placed within the building, which gives a clean look, while minimizing noise pollution on neighboring residences and extending the life of the equipment, Nolde says. A small flat roof holds the condenser housed within the metal paneling. The roof system is a metal standing seam roof.

The exterior at the back of the building has a completely different appearance. Instead of contrasting with the site, there are floor-to-ceiling, low-e glass windows and the building seems to blend into its surroundings of natural vegetation and nearby residential properties.

From the inside, the windows provide a panoramic view of trees, plantings and nature. Such features maintain a sense of connection with nature, Nolde says.

“East of the site is mostly residential, so from a building standpoint, we laid the program out in that fashion,” he says. “We were very conscious of how we laid out the building on the site. We tried to be respectful of the residents and placed the parking lot west of the building and away from the homes. The water collections from the roof are diverted and supplements the wetlands and the natural vegetation south of the building.”

Site drives design

The unique shape of the building was driven by the size of the site and the square footage the branch needed, Nolde says. Additional design inspira-





CREATIVE COMPONENTS Adding visual interest throughout the library are features such as a free-flowing, three-dimensional wood trellis (opposite top, bottom) and a gas fireplace (right).

tion came from the site itself and its existing vegetation. “We have a beautiful site and we didn’t want to disturb that,” he says. “We wanted to embrace it all year round.”

In planning the building, it was important to minimize the building’s footprint.

“We tilted up the roof and kind of slid the building underneath,” Nolde says. “We simplified the exterior which allowed us to create a more exciting interior for library patrons.”

The treatment of storm water also drove much of the site layout. Surrounding the area are wetlands owned by the city. The wetlands are landlocked and at some point the city may be adding trails, he says. “We take the storm water that runs off the roof and lead it to bio-swales and detention ponds that hold the water until it can naturally be returned to the wetlands,” Nolde explains.

As storm water moves through the system, it is cleaned using a “treatment train” consisting of a series of different strategies, says Holly Henriksen, project manager for Thorson Baker & Associates. The idea is that the using several treatment practices in sequence provides greater overall treatment than one on its own.

“After a rain, the water from the roof runs down a rain chain at the front of the building and into an inlet that carries the water to the side of the building and outlets it into a vegetated swale,” she says.

The water travels through the vegetated swale and into the extended detention basin. As water travels through the vegetated swale, sediments are filtered out and the water is cooled, so the temperature of the water in the wetlands that receive the runoff is not raised. The extended detention basin holds the runoff and releases it slowly to the existing wetlands.

Similarly, the storm water from the parking lot trains into islands in the parking lot, which are vegetated swales that clean sediments from the runoff and cool the water as it is conveyed to the bio-swale. The bio-swale further



cleans and cools the water while allowing water to infiltrate into the soil to recharge the groundwater.

Although the project was only required to treat 40% of the site’s storm water, the project treats the entire site’s storm water.

Also, “because this is a public facility, this is a perfect opportunity to highlight some of the treatment practices, so that the public can see new methods of storm water management,” she explains.

Interior adds interest, efficiency

Inside, the building is filled with small details that make a big difference. The HVAC system is hidden away

below the raised floor, providing flexibility and efficiency. If the interior of the building is rearranged at any point in the future, the mechanicals can be easily reached and reconfigured.

“The HVAC system is a UFAD (under floor air distribution) that only tempers the occupied zone of up to eight feet or so,” explains Jim MacMillan, vice president, director of sustainability at Karpinski Engineering. “The space above the occupied zone is unconditioned. The system has a high level of thermal control that provides improved comfort for individual occupants.”

Other comfort considerations that were included in the design were



NATURAL TOUCH The color palette inside the space pulls in concepts from the outside and subtly unites the interior and exterior: the green carpeting with a design that resembles grass, plus large molded trees constructed in the children's area.



HVAC acoustics, and controls over lighting levels and indoor air quality.

Challenges are part of any project, but this one ran particularly smoothly, according to Patrick J. Monroe, project superintendent for Ozanne.

"The cooperation was outstanding," Monroe says. "Everyone knew what had to be done and they did it. There were no extensions. Everything was completed on time in spite of rain and mid-June storms."

The only real challenge presented during the project was construction of two huge, round skylights in the center of the library and the youth area. They serve as focal points and the drywall frames with reinforced steel took particular skill to construct. The skylight in the center of the library is 30 feet in diameter and the second in the youth area is 15 feet in diameter. While adding visual interest to the space, the skylights have an important function as they bring in natural light and reduce the amount of artificial lighting needed.

"The building has as an expansive glass façade braced by bent pipe frames that also support a low roof as well as a cantilever catwalk system," says Michael Thorson, principal, structural department at Thorson Baker + Associates. "There is a setback in the front façade creating a low roof that runs along a portion of the front façade."

The team designed bent pipe frames that not only brace the front façade, but also span horizontally to support the low roof, Thorson says.

"The pipe frames are a prominent architectural adjustment establishing a rhythm to the building façade," he says.

Extensive suspended ceiling systems and non-traditional framing, as well as some structural sculptures that were part of the building's frame, add to the architectural appeal.

Overhead, toward the rear of the interior, a free-flowing, amoeba-type three-dimensional wood trellis with pendant-type lighting sails overhead.



SETTLING INTO THE SURROUNDINGS The exterior at the back of the building incorporates floor-to-ceiling, low-e glass windows, allowing it to blend into the natural vegetation outside and nearby residential properties.

“It took real craftsmen to do that,” Monroe says. “The pieces fit together like a puzzle.”

The color palette inside the space pulls in concepts from the outside and subtly unites the interior and exterior: the green carpeting with a design that resembles grass, plus the nature-inspired wood trellis and large molded trees constructed at the entrance to the children’s area.

Artwork featured throughout the children’s area is reproduced with permission from the children’s books *Eye Guess* and *Animals in Camouflage*, both by author/illustrator Phyllis Limbacher Tildes. Also included is a collage entitled “(δfset)” by Cleveland-born artist T.R. Ericsson.

“There’s not a lot of color added to the spaces,” Nolde says. “The people, books and furniture – that’s what brings the color.”

A cloud ceiling in the conference room adds interest and a natural feel to the area. Other unique interior fea-

tures include pendant lights in globes around the perimeter of the space, suspended glass cube lights in the teen area, and a catwalk above the trellis at the back of the building to break off the open space at the windows. Subtle lighting in the hallway where the conference rooms are located comes from

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Ozanne Construction Company

fluorescent glass tubes embedded in the walls.

The branch has three study rooms with clear glass doors. It also includes a computer area with 30 desktop PCs, which are separated from surrounding spaces by a curved glass wall.

The information area in the center of the space is easily accessible from

any direction. As is the case in all of the branch libraries, book returns slots are at the entrance. However, the North Royalton branch patrons have the advantage of a drive-up window for book pickup and returns. A café at the front of the building offers a place to relax and replenish.

Planning for the branch began in the fall of 2011 and groundbreaking was in 2012. Despite heavy rains in the spring and early summer, the library was completed on time.

“It was a good mix of contractors,” says Joseph A. Molinar, project executive for Ozanne. The timing was critical because move-in of books and furniture had been planned and scheduled.

“This was a low-drama project,” says Strobel. “It was always a pleasure to visit the North Royalton project.” **P**

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