

LIBRARY TO REMAIN OPEN Construction of Kitchener central library expansion begins

by CARRIE DEBRONE

The plan for a \$41-million addition to Kitchener's main public library was celebrated and construction officially started with a groundbreaking ceremony Sept. 11th in front of the central branch at 85 Queen Street in Kitchener.

One of the most-used public services in the city, the elasticity of the central library's service provision has been stretched to the limit in recent years. Built in the early 1960s to serve a maximum population of 70,000, it now serves 1,000 people a day in a growing city of 224,000 and it needs more space to meet ballooning public demand.

Every year, two million books are borrowed from the local library and reference librarians answer 100,000 questions. It also provides collection and administrative support to four community libraries.

Over the years, there has been considerable public discussion about whether to expand or relocate the library. In the end, expansion was considered the best option.

"The words excitement and gratitude come to mind," said KPL



About 100 guests, library staff, board members and local politicians were on hand September 11 for the groundbreaking ceremony to officially kick off the construction of the library's \$41-million expansion and new parking garage. Turning the sod with shovels are, from left: Kitchener Centre MPP John Milloy, Kitchener Mayor Carl Zehr, Library CEO Sonia Lewis, Library Board Chair Dan Carli, and Joe Maio from Maystar Contractors.

Chief Executive Officer (CEO), Sonia Lewis at the groundbreaking ceremony, which drew about 100 guests and supporters including local politicians, project architects,

library staff and members of the library board.

"Six years ago we presented a business case to city council. A few years later they approved it," she said, adding that when councillors gave that approval "they were investing in the quality of life of every Kitchener resident."

"We're not just building a physical building. It's about community building," Lewis said.

"This has been a long time coming," said Kitchener Mayor Carl Zehr.

"We always knew there was this need in the community. A library is more than its collection of books.

It's a valuable resource. It is instrumental in an informed community," Zehr said, adding that the expansion will allow the ongoing evolution of library services.

The project will include a complete renovation of all three floors of the existing main library, along with a 25,000-square-foot, two-storey addition to the rear of the building.

The library's tri-level underground, 412-car parking garage, projected to cost over \$18-million, is being partially funded by the province and Waterloo region and will be shared by the new consolidated courthouse and regional headquarters.

The whole project is expected to be completed by January 2013. The central library will remain open during the construction.

In the first phase of construction, the underground parking garage will be constructed behind the library followed by construction of the new library addition.

When the first phase is completed, the library will provide service from its new addition while renovations are made to the original portion of the library during phase two of the project.

Kitchener Centre Member of Provincial Parliament John Milloy congratulated the many people who worked to move the project forward and said he found it impossible to come to an event like the groundbreaking without remembering what the library means to him personally.

He humorously recounted how

he spent a lot of time in the library as a boy and told how he later experienced a library romance when as a young man he developed a crush on a girl who worked behind one of the library desks. Milloy later married her best friend.

"I don't know what happened to the girl I first had the crush on. Maybe she still works here," he joked.

He described the library as a "real hub in the community."

"The outreach work that you do is great," he said predicting, "This will be one of the city's best resources."

"This is the culmination of a decade of hard work and planning," said Dan Carli, Chair of the Library Board.

Carli said the demands for library services have changed so much over its 126 years, adding that when the library first opened children were not allowed inside.

The library will be adding many more computers, which will be available for public use.

"We want to be able to access the technology that is available to day," Carli said.

"The library is not a warehouse of books. It is a place to learn, share, listen and be heard. It's more needed in today's knowledge-based community than ever before," he said.

"Everyone is always welcome at KPL. Thanks to the public's passion we are able to build a legacy for our children," Carli said.




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Kitchener Centre

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