

Library quietly undergoing a transformation

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KITCHENER — In three years, it will be a sleek, modern building that embraces its past and accentuates its future.

Until then, the Kitchener Public Library is trying its best to manage its day-to-day operations as that evolution unfolds.

Three years of construction means disruptions are inevitable. Last month, staff moved their offices into downstairs meeting space, meaning the rooms are no longer available for rent by the community.

Their popular noontime lecture series had to be moved off-site and the computers in the homework room have already been relocated and that program suspended for the time being.

But, even with those shifts, there will be little change noticeable for most library users for the time being.

“For the most part, it’s business as usual and we’ve been able to maintain everything intact,” said Sonia Lewis, library CEO.

The \$40-million expansion project officially broke ground in September, but most of the work that has gone on so far has been low key and behind the scenes. Contractors are on site now installing construction barriers inside the building and the parking lot behind the library has been blocked off.

The drop box has been moved to the Queen Street entrance and is now only available when the library is closed.

In January, when work will start on the new underground parking garage that will sit below the library’s 25,000-square-foot addition, the site will appear more like a work in progress.

As things have been shifted around, the library partnered up with other organizations and moved some of its programming out into the community. Its neighbourhood branches have picked up some of those activities and others have been shifted to other spaces.

“We’ve had tremendous response to doing story time in the (Kitchener) Market,” Lewis said. The noontime lectures have also continued at Wilfrid Laurier’s Lyle S. Hallman School of Social Work.

The library has already seen one success on the road to its new and improved home. Its fundraising campaign, which was quietly rolled out in June, has already exceeded its \$100,000 target for the year.

Much of that is thanks to an early \$25,000 donation from Christie Digital, Lewis said.

The Evolve Literally fundraising campaign will be rolled out to the rest of the community in a more visible way in the months to come, Lewis said. For now, staff at the libraries are making their presence known by wearing shirts with the logo every Friday.

The goal throughout the construction, Lewis said, is to keep the building open to the public as much as possible.

Any disruptions or changes will be posted on a wipe board at the library and on the KPL website.

“We’re doing the best we can to keep people in the community informed about what’s going on,” she said. “Some days, there will be surprises and we’ll have to be ready for those.”