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TechNook: in Memory

Murrysville Community Library's TechNook children's little theater project is a family memorial honoring the memory of a daughter, Kathleen Smolenski, who cared deeply about library services for children and advancement of literacy. Construction of it was started on February 22 and essentially completed in April.

That it got done is due to the Smolenski family's kind generosity to the Murrysville Community Library Foundation. The Foundation is the fundraising organization that serves the Murrysville Community Library through unrestricted and restricted giving, memorials, and planned giving. In the instance of the TechNook project, the Smolenski family provided the very generous foundational gift, and other generous people added memorial gifts restricted to the project. Our sincerest thanks to Anita and Chet and all of you who made this possible, this special new theater space within the library for children's, and yes even adult, programming.

The TechNook little theater, following the custom design of Design 3 Architecture is in an alcove space within the existing library footprint. It opens out into the main, open library area without new walls or confinement of any kind. It stands out by its newly painted background walls and differentiated flooring. There are no permanent seats within it. Children will sit on floor mats to face the centerpiece 65" TV mounted on a pre-existing wall within the theater. Adults will have the option of moving chairs from the surrounding space into or around the theater.

The permanently fixtured, large-screen TV adds reliable streaming functionality to the library. In two previous attempts to stream either special programming or remote author participation for book discussion there were glitches introduced by jury-rigged connectivity. It is those failures, with cables running every which way, that led to the idea of the TechNook little theater as we now have it.

Why is it important to have it? COVID-19 has taught us why, if we did not already know. It is not good enough to get past this COVID-19 crisis and return to business as usual, as life and library were before March 2020. That is not what should be our goal. Our goal should be to learn from the crisis, and strive for something better that has been realized from it. We have.

What have we learned? We have learned to be a lot more virtual. We have witnessed a significant uptick for streaming resources with great STEM, Arts, and entertainment content. We have learned to meet with others virtually, opening up new possibilities to host children's and adult programming and meet with authors. We have learned that libraries can offer free streaming services on-site to patrons. Sometimes those services, just as with books, come with a small up-front cost, which libraries can absorb as part of their mission; patrons might be deterred by a one-use cost.

TechNook is MCL's little theater to stream programming in comfort to you. The dream of having video programs for children, something Kathleen would have enthusiastically

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supported, drove it to completion; you will all find it welcoming. Please watch for the new program offerings to come, but please also be patient about how COVID-19 still limits congregating for a while yet.

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