

Published in the Penn-Franklin News on 5/11/22.

Centennial Year in a Golden Age

Murrysville Community Library (MCL) has just approved a Strategic Plan 2022-24. The MCL Foundation, besides giving input to it, is working on a companion document (see article of 4/13/22). And this year is the Centennial Celebration year for the MCL. How timely it was then that on New Year's Day 2022 the Washington Post ran an opinion piece entitled "The Golden Age of Public Libraries Dawns Again." Citation: <https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2022/01/01/public-libraries-golden-age/>.

It began with this: "As the world enters 2022, public libraries are emerging as one of the bright spots — literally.

"An abundance of new and newly renovated libraries have opened their doors in the past two years. In addition to being breathtakingly beautiful, many are exemplars of what great community spaces can and should be."

It ended with this:

"Libraries are the heart of communities. Even at times in the pandemic when physical libraries were closed, libraries loaned e-books and digital movies. More recently, computer labs at public libraries have become a lifeline for people applying for jobs and doing their first Zoom interviews. Some are even lending out laptops and WiFi devices.

"As then-American Library Association President Julius C. Jefferson Jr. put it, 'Buildings may not have been open, but libraries were never closed.'"

In between, the editors kvelled (in Yiddish for full flavor and you will have to look it up) about the glass-walled, open spaces of the Deichman Bjørvika Library in Oslo; "Wormhole Library" in Haikou, China; Stanley A. Milner Library in Edmonton, Alberta; Fayetteville Public Library in Arkansas; Stavros Niarchos Foundation Library in Manhattan; and D.C.'s newly redone Martin Luther King Jr. Memorial Library.

Bill Snyder, Foundation Board Director and architect, brought another to our attention: the beautifully renovated Roxbury Branch of the Boston Public Library, which you can visit at <https://www.aia.org/showcases/6484217-roxbury-branch-of-the-boston-public-librar>.

Most interesting from the point of view of strategic planning are the non-traditional spaces, including atria, outdoor patios and rooftop terraces, and spaces for new functions, including recording/editing studios for podcasts and videos, a teaching kitchen, and a sewing center. Such spaces are not always associated with books, but in these Libraries they can be, and should be. This column has spoken before about some of the above, in particular a potential outdoor learning space described as TechNook II.

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Not mentioned by the Post is the possibility of an outdoor garden learning center, which Delmont Public Library built into its new Library, and “green” functionalities” that are also integral to Delmont. There is a lot to talk about in the context of the Centennial. After all, Libraries, like life itself, have changed dramatically in the last 100 years; they will again in the next 100.

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