

# The Tommy Douglas Library Opens!

By Deb Thomas.

Burnaby Public Library's newest branch, the Tommy Douglas Library, opened its doors to the public for the first time on November 16, 2009. Under construction since June of 2008, the library generated a lot of local excitement as it took shape. Over 700 area residents turned out for the grand opening on November 28.



Replacing the aging Kingsway branch was one of BPL's long term facility goals but was implemented earlier than planned due to the City of Burnaby's focus on urban renewal in the Edmonds Town Centre area.



## The neighbourhood

Edmonds Town Centre has undergone significant demographic changes since the Kingsway Branch was built in 1962. In the last 25 years alone, the number of low-income and immigrant families has doubled and less than half of area residents speak English as their mother tongue.

## Community needs

Use of the branch has also changed. Public computers were added in the 1990s to a facility not designed for these technologies. Demand quickly outstripped the available computer stations. When the branch was closed in mid-September, there were only a small number of computers available during all open hours, while 28 were housed in a computer lab only open 20 hours a week. Wireless was added in 2008 but there were insufficient plug-ins for laptops.

Increasingly, the branch was being used for study space by students of all ages but there were an inadequate number of chairs and tables for this purpose and quiet zones were hard to find. The tiny Teen space was very popular but there was no room for expansion. Meeting and program space was at a premium—the one room was shared by the Children's Librarian for storytimes, the Vancouver Community College ESL Learning Centre, and community groups—while demand for children's and settlement programs was increasing. Staff work areas were crowded with insufficient desk space and computer stations.

## Planning for change

Planning for the new branch incorporated all of these factors with the intent of creating a sustainable, flexible space that met the current needs of the community and could be adapted to meet future changes in use. The design is intentionally urban modern to make it more accessible to the diverse cultures in the area. Read, Learn and Discover are engraved in Chinese, French and English on benches lining the west side of the library. Its main doors are directly across the street from a homelessness outreach centre at the Southside Community Church where our librarians go once a month to hand out magazines and paperback books and engage with a demographic who are heavy users of the branch.

Among the improvements in the new library are:

- More public computer stations, with a smaller number in the computer lab. Children's computer stations up to 6 from only 1 in the old branch.

- More public catalogue stations including 2 in the children's area and 4 mounted on shelving units in the adult stacks
- Twice the number of seats as the old branch with a variety of seating options: comfortable lounge chairs, counter height stools in the Teen Zone, chairs with tablets for laptops, the popular "people" chairs, and so on
- Wireless Internet access and plentiful power receptacles (some built in to the study tables) for laptops
- RFID for loss prevention and circulation and Burnaby Public Library's first self-check station
- Two designated program rooms: children's and multipurpose (shared with VCC ESL Learning Centre) with built in screens and data projectors
- Defined Teen Zone with lots of seating and more shelf and display space



The branch is aiming for LEEDS certification and has many sustainable features:

- Lighting: substantially day-lit with daylight sensors and automatic dimming controls
- Heating: geothermal with radiant heat in the floor slab
- Ventilation: displacement ventilation system with heat recovery, natural ventilation through opening windows
- Materials: low VOCs (volatile organic compounds) for better air quality, FSC (Forest Stewardship Council) wood
- Construction: reuse of waste products in concrete, thick walls to aid in thermal regulation
- Water: reuse of water from roof for irrigation, low-flow fixtures in washrooms
- Green roof: aids in reducing storm water discharge and helps cool the building



### Community response

In the first full month of opening, circulation has risen 33% over last year at this time. Reference questions are also increasing and are different than in the old branch, notes Branch Manager Roberta Summersgill. While reference in the old branch tended to be for practical needs—chiefly immigration and settlement issues—now “people we haven't seen before are coming to the new library and having higher expectations of our collections and services.”



The branch is being used very much as we envisioned it with students finding the study spaces they need (and Tweeting about it!), children flocking to the children's computers and enjoying the self-check stations, patrons naturally finding and using the new dispersed public catalogues, the variety of seating nearly always in use, and so on.

The light spilling in through clear and coloured windows and the white walls and high ceilings give the branch a feeling of light and space. Acoustical panels on the walls and false ceilings and the lack of mechanical fans contribute to an overall quieter

atmosphere and better separation of study areas from the children's area ensures that there is quiet where it is needed.



There are still a few bugs in the sophisticated heating and cooling system to be worked out and in the functionality of staff and public areas due to very different work and traffic flow in the new branch. For example, patrons have requested a surface near the new return slots to place other possessions while putting items into the slot and a shelf will be added to accommodate this. Generally, area residents love the new branch's light and airy feel, more space and seating, and its new technological features. One patron enthused, "It's so beautiful, I could live here!"

For more information and more photos, check out our blog at [www.edmondslibrary.wordpress.com](http://www.edmondslibrary.wordpress.com)

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