

Burnaby Public Library's Bob Prittie Metrotown Branch Turns 20!

By Deb Thomas.

On October 1st, 2011, the Bob Prittie Metrotown Branch opened its doors for 20 hours of continuous programming to celebrate its 20th anniversary.

Before the branch was built in 1991, Burnaby Public Library's main branch, located on Kingsway and Edmonds, was a mere 14,000 square feet. In response to a growing population in Burnaby and increased demand for library services, a new main branch of 61,000 sq ft was conceived and built in the Metrotown area. It was the largest public library branch in the Lower Mainland at the time. It opened to predictions of 1,500 people entering its doors a day. Today, 20 years later, an average of 2,500 people enter its doors daily and the Metrotown area is considerably denser and more diverse.

On the day of the anniversary celebrations, nearly 6,000 people entered the doors to engage in the planned activities as well as making use of the branch in the usual ways — returning, browsing and borrowing collections; studying and reading; and using public computers or wireless Internet.

Contests and preparations

Leading up to the day, we ran three contests: My Favourite Book Moment in which people could submit drawings or photographs of favourite moments in books or with books for a cash prize; Chinese Readers' Favourites in which readers of our Chinese collections could pick their favourite books in four categories and be eligible for a prize draw; and a Twitter contest in which participants answered a question a day to earn points toward a grab bag of interesting prizes including a copy of the Twitter cookbook *Eat Tweet* and Balzac's "Atwood Blend" coffee.

Displays of photographs of the area before the branch was built (there were no high-rises to be seen!), during the building, on opening day, and of significant events in the intervening years were created and posted in the foyer. Lists of bestselling books and songs and top-rated or award winning films and TV shows from 1991 were also displayed.

The celebration begins

The day began with a community breakfast of free muffins and coffee at 7 a.m. The branch usually opens at 9 a.m. on a Saturday but it was busy by 7:30 a.m., with people lined up for the refreshments and asking for tickets to the puppet shows later in the morning.



A singer performs Chinese opera aria in the Civic Square outside of Burnaby Public Library's Bob Prittie Metrotown Branch. Photo by Tina Artuso.

By 8 a.m., our Home Library Services department had set up their display in the foyer. Burnaby's longest birthday card (a very long roll of foot-wide paper on which participants in the celebrations could record their birthday greetings in whatever language they prefer) was ready for entries. Over the course of the day, the roll was completely filled with best wishes in a variety of languages and alphabets including Chinese, Punjabi, and German, and colourful and imaginative pictures by the youngest of our branch's patrons.

A regular Tai Chi group who practice in Civic Square outside of the library were invited to perform and embraced the opportunity to showcase Chinese culture. The resulting performances at 9 a.m. included Tai Chi demonstrations with fans and swords, Chinese dance, a Chinese opera aria, and the beautifully synchronized movements of a fitness group that includes participants from 35 to 85 years old.

By 10 a.m., the first puppet show was underway and the program room packed with children and parents. The second performance of the Noisy Show featuring several of our children's librarians was equally well attended and enjoyed.

An e-book clinic began on the branch's second floor with our e-resources librarian sporting an "Ask me about e-books!" badge. Participants were "eager and enthusiastic" and each was given ample time to feel well informed on the use of his or her e-book and Library to Go.

At 11 a.m., the Mayor and Library Board Chair gave formal remarks in the foyer, reminiscing about the planning for and building of the branch 20 years ago and how much libraries have changed in the past 20 years. This event was attended by city councillors, school board representatives, and local MLAs and MPs – as well as many patrons who paused in their activities to listen.

Community Partner displays were set up in the Library's Reading Lounge. The agencies — Burnaby Family Caregivers Project, the Canadian Diabetes Association, Service Canada, SUCCESS, Mosaic, and Literacy Now Burnaby — were all partners with whom we have offered programs or engaged in other initiatives.

Shadbolt Centre for the Arts, who coordinates programming all summer in Civic Square, contributed an activity that ran from noon to 4 p.m. in which people of all ages could produce their own "comic postcards." Graphic novels were available for inspiration.

At 1 p.m., the talented Tempos Youth Choir, made up chiefly of youth with visual impairments, drew a large crowd in the branch's foyer and gave forth with truly joyous renditions of such favourites as *We Rise Again* and Leonard Cohen's *Hallelujah*. They also sang the theme song of our Home Library Services, "There's a story at my door" (<http://www.bpl.bc.ca/home-library-service/news-and-events>) to hear the song for

yourself), of which the group's director is a long-time user.

Also at 1 p.m., 20 Stories — readings of our children's librarians' 20 favourite picture books over the last 20 years — began in the Children's section. Over the seven hours of readings, people of all ages enjoyed the dramatic readings by various staff and trustees.

Silk Road gave two performances of "China Speaks My Language" at 2 and 3 p.m. in which traditional instruments and folk songs from Asian and Western countries were played. Imagine a French-Canadian folksong accompanied by a pipa!

Outside in Civic Square, the City of Burnaby's Parks and Recreation staff offered crafts for children, which included decorating the sidewalk around the entrance with colourful chalk drawings.

The final performance of the day was a demonstration of Chinese brush painting by local artist Nancy Chen.



The Tempos Youth Choir sings in the foyer of the Bob Prittie Metrotown Branch of Burnaby Public Library. Photo by Tina Artuso.

At 4:30 p.m., birthday cupcakes, coffee and juice were available, with a line-up out the door of patrons waiting for their treat.

A surprise hit for the day was the Cake Search — a scavenger hunt for large cardboard birthday cake slices, numbered and with various distinguishing toys on top of them. Participants had to find all of the cake slices, encouraging them to explore parts of the library they might not normally visit, and record the toys next to each slice's number. Each of the returned entries received a modest prize of a party blower. The branch buzzed with the energy and



A family signs the "longest" birthday card at the celebrations for Burnaby Public Library's Bob Prittie Metrotown Branch's 20th Anniversary. Photo by Tina Artuso.

enthusiasm of the searchers - both parents and children!

At 8 p.m., the program room became a games room for tweens and teens with Wii video games, board games and snacks.

When the library closed at 10 p.m., the program room was left open for showings of Film Noir and our in-house production of a zombie-infused short that traces the path of a book from ordering to checkout at the branch.

At 3 a.m., dedicated and weary staff, including one trustee who attended all 20 hours of programming, headed home satisfied that the Bob Prittie Metrotown branch's 20 years of excellent service to the community was truly and wonderfully celebrated.

A footnote:

Many patrons approached us throughout the day and afterward to congratulate us and thank us for the work we do to ensure that the library is a place they enjoy. We also received messages through our e-ref service. One such message particularly touched us:

"Since I immigrated to Canada 15 years ago, the Burnaby library turned me from an occasional reader who thought it was necessary to buy books one wanted to read, to a constant visitor to its comforting environs and a regular reader. Anyone who thinks the library as an actual brick structure with people staffing it may one day be replaced by a virtual library has no idea of what the people in the library do by way of providing assistance, ideas, support, etc to all its users. Congratulations and may you always be there to inspire and educate us."

These messages definitely reminded us why we are all work at Burnaby Public Library!

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