

# Emily Carr Branch goes Uptown

By Lynne Jordon.

The Greater Victoria Public Library (GVPL) started the new year with a bang by opening the doors to its newly relocated Emily Carr Branch at the Uptown shopping complex in Saanich on January 6, 2014.

GVPL had identified the relocation of the branch as the top priority in its 2010 facilities plan *Making Space for the Future*. While a much-loved fixture in the neighbourhood, the old branch suffered from lack of elevator access between the two floors, was landlocked between two major, one-ways roads and had limited site parking. The inflexible space no longer met staff and patrons' needs. As a result, branch usage dropped over the years.



GVPL CEO Maureen Sawa and Saanich Mayor Frank Leonard at the official ribbon cutting ceremony. Photo by Susie Jones, GVPL.

When looking for a new site for the branch the mantra was location, location, location. The Uptown site is across the street from the old branch and, fittingly, was the former site of the Town & Country Shopping Plaza where the original Victoria-Saanich Branch was in the 1960s. With thousands of people visiting Uptown every day to shop, work and use other services, it was the logical location for the library.

The new branch is a marked departure from the old branch with bright, modern fixtures and flexible space. Much of the building design is inspired by the library's namesake with the interior featuring reproductions of two of Emily Carr's paintings, *Odds & Ends* and *Blue Sky*, courtesy of the Art Gallery of Flexible seating and lots of natural light at the new



Emily Carr Branch at Uptown. Photo by Susie Jones, GVPL.

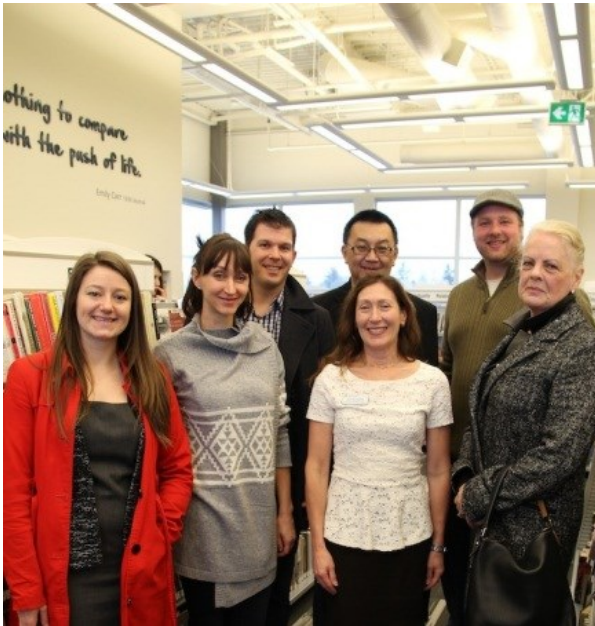
Greater Victoria, and the outdoor reading garden including plantings mentioned in her writings on wildflowers.

New technologies are front and centre at the branch including an innovative, made-at-GVPL solution for self-checkouts. The new self-checkouts use touchscreen tablets and a scanner at a fraction of the cost of standard library self-checkouts. Patrons have the option to scan their physical library card, enter their library card number or scan the library card barcode from a smartphone. They can pay their fines instantly using Visa or Mastercard and can choose to have their receipt emailed to them thereby saving paper.

The Emily Carr Branch is also the first GVPL site to use to an automated materials handling system for self-check in. Staff have nicknamed the machine Aggie, and she is already proving her value by freeing up staff from materials processing so they can spend more time helping patrons and getting library materials on the shelves more quickly. Aggie has also proved to be great entertainment for patrons who enjoy watching their items travel down the conveyor belt!

Other key features of the new branch include:

- Stunning views and lots of natural light for reading.
- A modern space with flexible furnishings, including collapsible tables, chairs on wheels and mobile shelving, which can be easily reconfigured depending on programming and patron needs.



Construction team left to right: Kate Phelan, Wensley Architects, Vancouver Office; Jen Chapman Story and Stewart Story, Story Construction; Doug Wong, Wensley Architects, Victoria Office; Lynne Jordon, Greater Victoria Public Library; Arie Vanderhoeven; Heather Kallos, Heather Kallos Interior Design. Missing: Von Bishop, District of Saanich. Photo by Susie Jones, GVPL.

- Outdoor reading garden.
- Interactive children's learning panels purchased with a grant from IslandLink Federation.
- Adjusted hours to accommodate a Monday opening, which has been long desired by the community.

Although it is early days, the new branch is demonstrating that if you build it, they will come. On opening day, more than 1,100 people visited the branch, which is one of four Saanich branches. The branch also welcomed many new members who signed up for library cards. "People do vote with their feet and this is clearly where they want us to be," said GVPL CEO Maureen Sawa.

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*Lynne is responsible for facilities and strategic planning, and the oversight of collections and technical services. Emily Carr Branch relocation is the third building project she has completed at GVPL.*