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Central Library's grand reopening set for Oct. 1

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Posted: Friday, September 23, 2016 12:01 am | Updated: 1:48 am, Fri Sep 23, 2016.

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DVD's sit on a shelf, including the Big Lebowski, in the Tulsa Central Library on Thursday, September 22, 2016. IAN MAULE/Tulsa World

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Central Library opening

When: 10 a.m. Oct. 1

Where: Fifth Street and Denver Avenue

What: Family-friendly events in and around the renovated library

A Starbucks coffee shop has already opened to the public, operating from 6:30 a.m. to 10 a.m. Mondays through Saturdays and 7 a.m.

By Ginnie Graham Tulsa World | 1 comment

Photo Gallery: The renovated Central Library

Central Library staff are putting out the last of the materials, arranging furniture and getting artwork in place, all in anticipation of a grand opening on Oct. 1.

The \$55 million worth of renovations to the building includes modern but comfortable furniture, updated technology, new areas for creation, study cubicles overlooking downtown Tulsa and a children's area filled with play stations and book bins for easy access.

Educators have a reserved floor for tackling problems; patrons can record music in a digital lab; and researchers continue to have the quietest floor. An outdoor garden will feature events from movies to music.

All this is available to patrons after walking by a new coffee shop at the library's entrance at Fifth Street and Denver Avenue.

"This has been a 5-year project in the making to transform a very well-loved but well-worn building into something for the 21st-century customer," said Gary Shaffer, chief executive of the Tulsa City-County Library System.

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Photo Gallery: The renovated Central Library

The library will be “a place where people can convene, collaborate and create. And we recently added a fourth ‘c’ to that, which is coffee — a Starbucks coffee as well in the Central Library,” he said.

While much is new, the newly renovated library gives a nod to the original architecture and materials. The grand staircase — called the Helmerich Staircase — remains, with photos hanging underneath of the past winners of the Peggy V. Helmerich Distinguished Author Award.

The Clarence Day quote — beginning with “The world of books is the most remarkable creation of man” — is now permanently etched above the staircase.

Architects of the project are the Minneapolis-based firm MSR Design (Meyer Scherer & Rockcastle) and the local firm of Crafton Tull. The designers spoke with the original architect of the building, Charles Ward, who created it more than 50 years ago.

The grand opening will have family-friendly events and demonstrations on the different aspects of the modernized library.

The renovations were funded by \$25 million in public money and the rest in private donations.

For more than a decade, residents and library leaders debated what to do with the aging facility, which turned 50 years old last year. Voters rejected a 2004 bond proposal to build a new central library in another location.

When Shaffer was hired in January 2011, it was decided to keep the main library downtown and add to the booming revitalization that began with the construction of the BOK Center. Planning began after his hiring, and construction started about three years ago.

The building’s floors have been renumbered to be in line with the layout of the entrance and the original architect’s plan. Patrons enter on the first floor. There are two stories above and two lower levels.

Upon entering, patrons will see the staircase and popular fiction and nonfiction on the shelves. A large children’s section lines the north side, punctuated with “play and learn towers” that have games and pretend-play items.

The second floor has a “maker space” that offers soldering, a 3D maker and a digital recording lab. Glass study cubes with chairs and tables jut from the building for views of downtown.

Chairs and couches are situated throughout the building.

“A library is about books and people coming together and learning,” Shaffer said. “But it’s also about reading and being comfortable, so there are a lot of different seating arrangements.”

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"This will be the quietest floor," Shaffer said. "It's a little noisy down below. And as you rise up, it will get quieter and quieter."

The lower level features the Aaronson Auditorium. It has gone from an octagon shape to a square, adding a little more room. A walkway to the parking garage will give direct access to events.

"It was designed to do theater in the round," Shaffer said of the auditorium. "That lasted about two years, and it left 48 years without that."

The second lower level is the Greadington Center, sponsored by the Charles and Lynn Schusterman Foundation. It is named for [Pocahontas Greadington](#), the first black person to assume an administrative role in Tulsa Public Schools. She wrote four elementary math textbooks, served on many local boards and was given an honorary life membership by the board of directors of the National Conference of Christians and Jews for her leadership.

The area is meant for use by educators for planning, problem-solving and creation. It has a mini-kitchen for all-day meetings, a magnetic writing wall, a stage, moveable furniture and a section with a multicolored aluminum divider for a smaller gathering area.

Shaffer said the purpose is to offer an off-school site with resources and a library staff member to tackle problems — from realigning curriculum to rerouting school bus routes.

"Whatever their challenge, we will help them fix that," he said.

The physical plant features rainwater collection tanks to irrigate the outdoor gardens and an energy-efficient chilled-beam cooling system. Solar panels are on the roof to add to the energy conservation. AAON Inc. donated the materials and made a cash donation.

"This is the main genesis of the project," Shaffer said. "The heating and cooling infrastructure was at the end of its life. It was well-maintained, but parts were having to be fabricated or not available anymore. Not having air conditioning in the middle of Oklahoma summers meant the building would have to close."

Shaffer continued, saying this is "a teachable moment, too. We can teach kids that this is how to build a building for the future."

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