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[SCENE](#)
[BUSINESS](#)
[COMMUNITIES](#)
[BLOGS](#)
[OPINION](#)
[WEEKEND](#)
[WEATHER](#)
[PHOTO](#)
[VIDEO](#)
[DATABASES](#)
[OBITS](#)

[CALENDAR](#)
[STORE](#)

[Free Access:](#)
[Jobs](#)
[Autos](#)
[Pets](#)
[Homes](#)
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Home > Scene > Books

## While Central Library is closed, where did books go?

[Story](#)
[Comments \(6\)](#)
[Image \(7\)](#)

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Posted: Monday, January 18, 2016 12:00 am | Updated: 3:00 pm, Mon Jan 18, 2016.

[Previous](#) [Next](#)



Karen McCullough pulls a book from the Central Library collection to be delivered to a branch library. The Central Library collection was moved to a temporary home so renovations could take place at the downtown library. STEPHEN PINGRY/Tulsa World

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By JIMMIE TRAMEL • World Scene Writer | 6 comments

Thousands of cars zip past a building near Sheridan Road every day.

Drivers probably have no idea they're cruising by a hidden refuge.

What kind of hidden refuge?

If you're a book lover, it's paradise. It's Candyland.

"Oh my gosh. It is."

The words came from Suanne Wymer, deputy director at Tulsa City-County Library. She wasn't talking about a library, at least in the conventional sense. She was giving a tour in the aftermath of being asked this question: What happened to all those books that used to be at Central Library?

The downtown library is getting an extreme makeover. The library's "collection" was removed. Books were relocated in August and September of 2013. They're scheduled to go back "home" this summer.

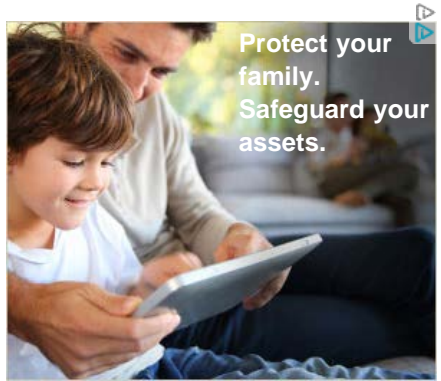
But where are they in the meantime?

Said Wymer: "I had a friend of a friend say, 'I just miss all the books at Central.' I said, 'Call me. I'll let you come over and you can pet them.'"

You, the public, can get your mitts on those books. Among the books is a copy of "Three Billy Goats Gruff." If you want to read about the goats' encounter with a pre-Internet troll, you can request the book and it will be delivered to a branch library.

The books from Central Library are being warehoused at an administrative facility. Wymer said there are maybe 200,000 materials — books, DVDs, CDs, audio books — from Central Library at the facility.

Protect your family. Safeguard your assets.




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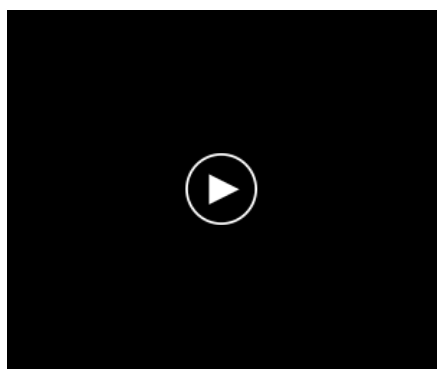
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Books aren't stacked in random piles. They're shelved and organized just like a "real" library.

Aisles of books seem to go on forever. But people are scarce. Remember that "Twilight Zone" episode where Burgess Meredith wanted only to read? The character he played would love to be locked in the hidden refuge.

But to be clear, the temp library isn't a place for milling around and browsing. Instead, customers can browse online ([TulsaLibrary.org](http://TulsaLibrary.org)) and place holds on materials they want routed to another library.

Wymer said she knows of libraries in other cities that faced similar issues. What do you do with a collection when a library becomes unavailable to the public? In some cases, collections were out of circulation for two or three years.

"We don't want to do that," she said.

In addition to keeping Central Library's collection in circulation, a research station was established inside the temp library. Though the facility is closed to the public, exceptions are made for those who make appointments to do research. Scholars can make appointments to utilize research materials by calling 918-549-7323.

"They let us know ahead of time what kinds of things they are looking for and the staff can have things prepared," Wymer said. "Or we just work with them when they get here."

There is an advantage to a browser-free facility. Library workers, granted unfettered access to the inventory, are able to take their time in evaluating materials. If a book is worn out, a replacement copy might be acquired. "Board" books – thick-paged books for children – tend to get chewed and otherwise abused, so Central Library will have a completely new collection of board books when the doors reopen.

Central Library also will be stocked with new books that weren't on shelves before the facelift. And that means somebody (sound like fun?) gets to pick out a bunch of new books.

"That's our department. It's a great job," Sue Anderson, collection management manager, said.

"We look a lot at stuff that is coming out in the next three to six months. We get a lot of pre-pub alerts from publishers. We get advance reader copies mailed to us from the publishers for us to have a look at and see: Is this exactly what we need? It's hard to know what a book is like when you are ordering it blind, so we read a lot of reviews and look for ... things that are probably going to wind up on the bestseller lists."

The library will always need new books by established authors like James Patterson and John Grisham. But it gets more challenging when trying to figure out which up-and-comer books should be ordered.

New books ordered for Central Library are suppressed. Translation: They're not available to be farmed out to branch libraries for immediate use.

"These will all go nice and pretty on the shelves when we open," Wymer said.

Late in a tour of the warehouse facility, Wymer directed visitors to shelves full of bound periodicals. The aroma screamed library.

A rest area for workers was populated with life-sized cardboard cutouts of James Dean (with a Groucho Marx mustache) and John Wayne (with Sean Connery's face). Are James Dean and the Duke going downtown when Central Library reopens?

Near the exit, staffers manned phones at a library call center.

Central Library still has a heartbeat – if you know where to look.

Jimmie Tramel 918 581-8389

[jimmie.tramel@tulsaworld.com](mailto:jimmie.tramel@tulsaworld.com)

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