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# On its 50th anniversary, Central Library preparing for the future by adding space for creativity

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Scottie Edwards hauls blocks at Central Library on Thursday. A total makeover is set to be finished next year. MATT BARNARD/Tulsa World

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Piles of metal studs and concrete blocks lie on the floors of Central Library, surrounded by scissor lifts, carts, tools and other construction equipment.

Last week, as the building hit its 50th anniversary, workers were inside welding pipes and putting up framing.

In a way, the building was commemorating its anniversary by working to become a library for the future, as officials have repeatedly said it will be once completed.

Central Library closed in the fall of 2013 for a \$50 million renovation project that will replace the building's mechanical systems, add a parking garage and open a new entrance on Fifth Street, among other things.

Although a few delays in the early stages extended the initial two-year timeline projection, everything is now set for a summer 2016 opening.

"Things are right on schedule," Tulsa City-

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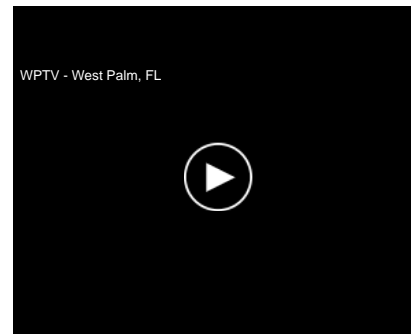
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County Library CEO Gary Shaffer said.

He said he is excited that the project to extend Fifth Street into the Civic Center Plaza is finally getting underway. City officials have said construction is expected to begin on the street in August.

“That’s kind of the last piece that needed to be put in place,” Shaffer said.

The library still looks like a “blank canvas,” as Shaffer called it, but the staff already has begun shopping for interior fixtures and furnishings. The building will be ready for

staff to move in by March or April, with an opening for the public scheduled in June.

When it opens, Central Library will feature many changes. In addition to a new entrance on Fifth Street, which will be the only public entrance, a new staircase will be built that will lead from the second to the top floor.

Some of the building’s best original features will be restored, too, Shaffer said, such as the “light airiness” that was there before interior walls were constructed and cut off some of the daylight. Those walls are now gone, and there will be high ceilings on all the public floors.

A coffee shop will also be a part of the new space, located immediately to the right when customers enter from Fifth Street. The balcony space on the second floor will be re-opened to the public on one side of the building and will be transformed into glass-enclosed study rooms on the east and west sides.

Staff offices will be moved from the top floor to the lower level, and the Schusterman Learning and Creativity Center will be on the second lower level.

A Children’s Garden will be located between the library and the garage.

Shaffer said that before the library closed for renovations, about 1,100 people a day visited the building. After the re-opening, officials are expecting about 2,000 people a day, due to the newness of the building, as well as the coffee shop and added programming.

Kim Johnson, chief operating officer for the library, said the remodel of the building will turn it into a destination space.

The learning and creativity center will offer after-school homework help and tutoring for students, as well as provide a space for brainstorming and innovation to be used by educators. It will feature furniture for “various learners,” Johnson said, such as a mix of sitting and standing desks.

“It’s all geared toward bringing out the creative side of users,” she said.

The library will also include a “maker space,” such as the one currently located at the temporary Librarium. The space will introduce users to new tools, like 3D pens and laser cutters, as well as some low-tech options.

A digital literacy lab and a STEM learning center will also be part of the renovated library, Johnson said.

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The Children’s Garden will provide a “wide-open, inviting green space for kids and their families,” she said.

“We really see this space as a place where kids can exercise their gross motor skills,” Johnson said.

The space can also be used for evening movie screenings.

“It will really be a destination space in the heart of our downtown area,” Johnson said.

Johnson said no other branch in the system will have all these features in the same space.

“It’s like no other library in the region,” she said.

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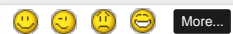


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