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The library's bookworm carries picture books on its back that children can check out.

Library turns new leaf

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Reporter

Framed photos of county lifestyles line the walls of a spacious library complete with iPads, new wooden shelving and

two glass collaborative group rooms.

Here, students are at work on desktop computers while others read quietly in new chairs and youngsters visit the

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Children's Library full of books and innovative learning centers.

The center is the newly renovated Richmond County Public Library (RCPL), and the emphasis is collaboration and technology.

RCPL, also the library for Rappahannock Community College (RCC) in Warsaw, reopened Jan. 3 after College Librarian Loftan Miller said that everything about the library, from the furniture and shelving to the use of space, had become outdated.

"The library space never really reflected the services that we offered to students and staff," said Miller. "We wanted a place that reflected that high quality of service."

RCC's Dean of Distance Learning and Technology Leslie Smith agreed.

"We offer so many online databases that students probably didn't even think we had because the place was archaic looking," said Smith. "Certainly we want to reflect what we can do."

Miller noted a survey they put out to students, who said they wanted sections they could utilize in the library beyond coming and checking out books.

"Our students didn't have a place where they could come and just be in the old library," said Miller. "We want a space that [they] can find useful."

The redesigned spaces, she said, were to promote collaboration and signify to both students and the community that help was readily available to them.

"What we realized our students needed was a place for large and small groups to come and do work together," said Miller, who added that a majority of their students came from rural areas where internet access was lacking.

Therefore, the students needed a place to come and collaborate with one another over class assignments.

"It's the exact reason why our circulation desk looks the way it does," Miller said, referencing the small, low-to-the-ground structure that greets visitors at the front of the library.

She added the custom-made desk ensured there were no barriers between students and staff members; therefore, students felt comfortable asking for help.

In fitting with the theme of students working together, Smith and Miller pointed out the two new glass rooms at the back of the library.

The smaller collaborative room supports a table around which staff members could hold meetings or students could study, a dry erase board and space

for an upcoming flat-screen television.

Miller said the TV would be used by students to watch videos and movies that were required by class.

Inside the larger collaborative room sits a mediascape table with six laptop pods.

"Let's say you have your laptop and I have my laptop and we wanted to work on a project together," Miller said. "We can plug it in, it brings it up on a screen and [we can] work on them together."

Smith also said the renovations allowed the library to comfortably accommodate both students and the public.

"It's nice to be able to have the community section in one side and the students in the other because their focus is different," said Smith.

Students have access to 16 desktop computers in addition to iPads and laptops they can check out.

In addition, eight computers and four iPads are separately available for public use. The iPads at the end of the bookshelves also provide internet and allow both students and the public to do research and look up books.

The Children's Library

also received major upgrades in terms of technology and accessibility.

Two distinct sections of books greet children when they come in. Fiction stories line the walls while young readers can grab nonfiction books from the shelves in the middle of the room.

A rolling train...or, rather, the library's bookworm...carries picture books on its back that children can pick up and check out.

Parents now have chairs where they can sit and monitor their children as they read on the floor or the child-sized benches.

Young visitors can also access two iPads, a cube of age-related activities and a SMART table that allows them to play educational games and strengthen their academic skills.

Miller said members of the public have been "thrilled" with the changes.

"They were so limited with computer space in our temporary location," she said. "They now have more computer access in the new space than they did in the old libraries."

Miller added that the children could not really

come to the temporary library space.

"To have story hour back in the library and to see these little preschoolers come in is incredible," said Miller.

In planning for further changes, Smith said they wanted to extend the glass walls for the collaborative rooms to the ceiling in order to reduce noise coming from individuals in the room.

"We really love the glass, because you're still in the library, but not disturbing anyone else," Smith said.

Miller said they expect to add signage inside the library after RCC completes its marketing and branding process.

"All of this is beautiful, [but] I think if you came in here for the first time, you're a little unsure of what's what," said Smith. "Signage would be really important, especially for that new student or community member coming in."

RCPL is open Monday through Thursday, 8:30 a.m. to 8:30 p.m., and Friday through Saturday, 9:30 a.m. to 3 p.m. For more information, visit RCPL's website at <http://www.rcplva.org/> or call 804-333-6710.



The glass rooms at the back of the library provide separate space for meetings and study groups. The rooms also offer resources like the mediascape table.