Library Showcase:
Enoch Pratt Free Library, Roland Park Branch – Interview with Alexander Design Studio

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LOCATION ADDRESS

Enoch Pratt Free Library

Roland Park Branch

5108 Roland Avenue

Baltimore, MD 21210

http://www.prattlibrary.org/locations/rolandpark/index.aspx#directoryinfo

PROJECT INTRODUCTION

The Enoch Pratt Free Library is the public library of Baltimore City and the Maryland State Library Resource Center, and it is one of the oldest free public library systems in the United States. The Roland Park Branch of the Enoch Pratt Free Library serves communities of North Central Baltimore including Roland Park, Mt. Washington, Cross Keys, Homeland, Guilford, and Cheswolde.

The branch offers the following features:

- Public computers with Internet access and printers. These computers accept 3.5" floppy disks and USB drives (thumb drives, memory sticks, etc.)

- Wi-Fi throughout the building with electrical outlets available in the main reading room on the second floor for laptop users
- Dedicated computers for children, including one with no Internet access
- Two children's storytimes per week
- Photocopier–fees for pages based on black and white or color
- Meeting room with a capacity of 25 people available to community groups
- Metered parking and limited free on-street parking
- 1800+ DVD titles
- 1800+ Books on CD titles
- Interlibrary loan services

Though housed in a historic building, the branch suffered from a lack of overall space as well as accessibility issues. The expansion project added a curved ramp along the buildings' front, enabling access for people with disabilities and a rear service wing was removed which allowed the library to be extended. With the renovation the building doubled in size to 6,936 square feet.

Please describe the library renovation project featured in the American Libraries 2011 Library Design Showcase.

This project involved the renovation and addition to a beloved branch of the Enoch Pratt Free Library as well as providing a fully accessible building. Because of an extremely constrained site and the historic nature of the library, the design involved the demolition of a small rear wing and the wrapping of the original building with a new modern addition, the bulk of which is located on a lower level "base." The new addition attaches to the old in a sensitive way to allow the historic structure to stand free and clear. A new entrance at the lower level allows the noisy circulation, children's, and community room to be separated from the adult/young adult, and reading rooms above. A drop ceiling in the main reading room was removed to reveal the vaulted ceiling and arched windows that had been obscured for decades.

Why was the project needed?

The building was inaccessible, woefully inadequate for space and collections, and leaking at the lower level.

Did technology use or the demand for technology influence the space planning for the renovated library?

The technology played a large part in the expanded programming and a whole area was dedicated to public access terminals. They went from three stations to twelve.

Did patron needs fit into the planning/redesign process? If so, how?

There were 21 community meetings as a part of the planning process varying from neighborhood design groups to various patron groups. The funding was raised primarily by the community.

What has been the patron reaction to the renovated library?

It seems to be very beloved and has maintained and broadened its reputation as one of the busiest and most used in the system.

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