

Library Showcase:

Houston Public Library, Morris Frank Branch – Interview with Wendy Heger

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LOCATION ADDRESS

Houston Public Library, Morris Frank Branch
10103 Fondren
Brays Oaks Towers Building
Houston, Texas 77096

PROJECT INTRODUCTION

This project corresponds to a renovation carried out by the Houston Public Library, Morris Frank Branch, completed earlier in the year.

Please describe the planning and design process of the HPL's Morris Frank Branch (featured in the American Libraries 2010 Library Showcase).

Several years back, the American Library Association (ALA) put out a challenge: "What is an electronic library?" We here in HPL's Facilities Management along with a small local Architect took up that challenge. We defined it as:

HPL Express is an innovative library service model developed over a three years period by the Houston Public Library. What started as the e-library project, an in-house investigation of better ways to offer

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library resources electronically and to bridge the digital divide in under-privileged communities, has developed into a completely new way of providing library service to all communities.

Essentially, an HPL Express is a unique library facility that is intended to be installed within the walls of existing buildings; strip centers, multi-service centers, office buildings, shopping malls, airports, and so on.

By using Houston Public Library's advanced technology resources at HPL Express facilities, customers will have full access to the services, data, and collections of the entire library system. While the most popular and relevant materials will be kept on-site, customers may request other materials from any HPL location be delivered to any HPL Express for pick-up or use. The collections of the entire system are at their fingertips.

Computer classes, age appropriate programs, virtual tutoring, and access to HPL's vast collection of databases for scholars, researchers, students, small businesses, and others are readily available with a library staff specially trained and committed to the HPL Express Experience.

Even better is the bottom-line: Houston Public Library should be able to open the doors to a full-size HPL Express facility and operate it for ¼ the costs of a new traditional library while providing complete service to the same number of customers as a traditional library.

The Frank HPL Express location came about because of need and limited funding. The project originally was planned to be a major renovation of the existing neighborhood library at 6440 West Bellfort. However, due to new 100 year flood plain map issued during the design phase, the scope increased to include either a three foot retaining wall with automatic gates or the raising of the entire building by three feet. Cost for the renovation increased almost a million dollars more than budget. It was decided to abandon the existing facility and to provide an Express library in its place.

Do all four HPL Express Libraries have the same design and the same focus on technology? If not, what makes the Morris Frank Branch unique?

All four locations are based on the original concept for an HPL Express, but each is different in the services provided, size and concept. For example:

- HPL Express Discovery Green is only 450 square feet; and is supported by HPL's main library downtown.
- HPL Express Southwest is located in a COH Health Facility and is the most like our original concept.
- HPL Express Vinson is a separate space located in a larger Vinson Neighborhood Library.
- HPL Frank is located as a standalone almost twice the size of our concept, and has a greatly expanded book collection.

Did patron needs fit into the planning/design process?

Not really, it was a matter of money and timing which drove us to an Express location. However, we did take into account our facility goals for exciting spaces that welcome the public, are durable and sustainable, and provide smooth operations for maximum customer service.

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