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AMERICAN LIBRARIES MAGAZINE
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PLAN OF
CHICAGO

Chicago Library Commissioner
Mary Dempsey with Mayor
Richard M. Daley

OUR KIND OF TOWN

Chicago's Branch-Building Boom

PLUS: Human Error in Library Design ■ Architecture Showcase

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56 COVER STORY OUR KIND OF TOWN BY PEGGY BARBER AND LINDA WALLACE

Here's how Chicago Public Library's architectural renaissance is changing the neighborhoods around the more than four dozen libraries built or renovated in the past 17 years—a feat at any time, but especially when so many communities are struggling to keep branches open.

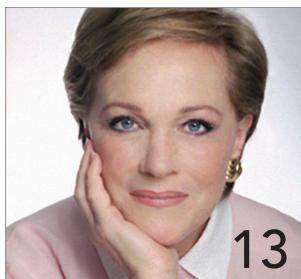
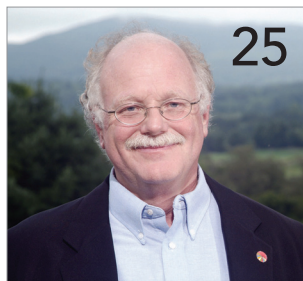
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Chicago Toddles No More

by Leonard Kniffel

There are two kinds of Chicago song lovers: those who prefer “My Kind of Town” and those who prefer “Chicago,” in which the city is referred to as “that toddling town.” I have always been one of the latter.

Working on this issue of *American Libraries*, however, gave me a better understanding of why citizens of the Windy City like to think that nobody in Chicago over the age of 3 toddles anymore—least of all Mayor Richard M. Daley, who graces the cover along with Library Commissioner Mary Dempsey.

We decided to lead off this annual architectural issue with a story about the Chicago Public Library (p. 56) partly because the city’s branch-building boom is rare in the nation. Sure, Seattle and Los Angeles, among others, have enjoyed a healthy spate of construction, but Mayor Daley’s involvement in the building or renovation of 52 Chicago branches over 17 years is phenomenal—and especially gratifying since it’s happening in the backyard of ALA Headquarters.

ALA veterans Peggy Barber and Linda Wallace checked out the story for themselves. Their account of the Chicago boom makes a case-in-point introduction to a 36-facility design showcase (p. 34) that once again flies in the face of the rumor that people don’t need libraries when “everything is on the internet.” So committed to libraries is Mayor Daley that he eagerly agreed to an exclusive interview and cover photograph in exchange for another opportunity to talk about the value of libraries to economic development and community life.

After the cover shoot, the mayor was hustled off to a press conference where—surrounded by television cameras and reporters—he announced a \$1-million grant to CPL from Bank of America. Wow, I thought, look at the great response from the media! But then the mayor opened it up to questions, and all the reporters wanted to ask about was city politics or taxes—everything but libraries. Not surprising, I suppose, since Daley had just two days earlier been reelected to an unprecedented sixth term.

I stood there thinking about the time Bill Gates had given *AL* an interview (Dec. 2003, p. 48–53). Asked what the biggest disappointment was about his foundation’s work with libraries, he said: “That it hasn’t gotten more visibility.”

The same with Mayor Daley and many others who’ve tried to use their celebrity to turn a spotlight on libraries. Even though his press conference was held in the library, in full view of dozens of patrons at computer banks and bookshelves, the library seemed to become invisible, or perhaps simply taken for granted. It’s the curse of good news. But we hope this issue helps the mayor demonstrate that libraries have not only stopped toddling, they are galloping. ■



Peggy Barber and Linda Wallace (with Chicago Mayor Richard M. Daley, “Our Kind of Town”) are principals and cofounders of Library Communication Strategies, a consulting firm based in Chicago. Their mission: to help libraries and librarians turn up the power and communicate more effectively. Barber previously was ALA Associate Executive Director for Communications. She established the ALA Public Information Office, Public Programs Office, and the ALA Graphics program, including the widely known “Celebrity Read” poster series. She chaired the National Coalition for Literacy and serves on the Community Advisory Board of Chicago’s public radio station, WBEZ, and the board of Friends of Libraries USA. Wallace was formerly Director of the ALA Public Information Office, where she launched Teen Read Week, Library Card Sign-Up Month, and many other public awareness campaigns. She is the author of *Libraries, Mission, and Marketing: Writing Mission Statements That Work* (ALA Editions, 2003) and has written and edited many publications, including ALA’s “@ your library” toolkits.



Jeannette Woodward (“Human Error”) is a consultant with the Wind River Nonprofit and Library Consulting Group in Lander, Wyoming. She is the former director of the Fremont County Library System, based in Lander, and the author of

Writing Research Papers: Investigating Resources in Cyberspace (NTC, 1997), *Countdown to a New Library: Managing the Building Project* (ALA Editions, 2000), *Creating the Customer-Driven Library: Building on the Bookstore Model* (ALA Editions, 2005), *Nonprofit Essentials: Managing Technology* (Wiley, 2006), and *Finding a Job after 50: Reinvent Yourself for the 21st Century* (Career Press, 2007).



After retiring from a career as a professional athlete, David Broderson (“The Fairest Library of Them All”) earned a Ph.D. concentrating on the history of architecture and urban development in a department of city and

regional planning. After almost a decade as an independent scholar writing about the relationship of aeronautics, astronomy, and astronautics to architecture, planning, public policy, and engineering, he returned to graduate school and received an MLS from Queens College focusing on reference. He is now on the faculty of the Newman Library at Baruch College, City University of New York. His current research delves into library history and design.



Chicago Library Commissioner
Mary Dempsey with Mayor
Richard M. Daley

Our Kind of T★OWN

How the Chicago Public Library is changing the city
by Peggy Barber and Linda Wallace



Four young patrons gather at the West Pullman branch.

Building or renovating 52 libraries in 17 years would be a feat for any community. That this renaissance occurred in Chicago—the city that “makes no small plans”—is perhaps not surprising. That it

has occurred when many library systems are struggling to keep branches open—and that the quality of the construction rivals its quantity—is.

Today the nondescript storefronts and dilapidated buildings that once characterized the Chicago Public Library system are largely gone. Almost 70% of its 76 branches are new or extensively renovated, full-service libraries. In neighborhood after neighborhood, Chicago’s new libraries have demonstrated their power to transform. Not only does library use soar, the neighborhoods themselves are revitalized. Aldermen now vie to have new or renovated libraries in their neighborhoods—and community residents sing their praises.

And while it may not be the largest library-building project (Los Angeles has built 67 libraries since 1989), Chicago’s revitalization reflects an exceptional partnership forged by Mayor Richard M. Daley with Library Commissioner Mary Dempsey. The two share a vision of the library as an integral part of education, a center of community life, and catalyst for economic development. Last year Dempsey was named one of the “Public Officials of the Year” by *Governing* magazine.

It was Daley who lured Dempsey, then a prominent attorney, back to libraries in 1994. Dempsey had earlier earned a master’s in library science from the University of Illinois and, while working at the Chicago firm of Sidley and Austin, was lured into the library and city government. Her charge: Create a world-class library for a world-class city.

Dempsey responded with the library’s first strategic plan. Developed with input from the library board, staff, and community, the approach provided a map for rebuilding the library’s infrastructure.

“This is a big city with a significant and diverse population,” said Jayne Carr Thompson, president of the CPL Board of Directors. “We needed to look at the established system and determine which communities had a need for library services and weren’t getting them, and how we could reallocate services in a way that made more sense.”

The plan gave the mayor what he needed to sell the

“Make no small plans; they have no magic to stir men’s blood and probably themselves will not be realized.”—Daniel H. Burnham, Chicago architect and city planner (1846–1912)

PHOTOGRAPH, OPPOSITE PAGE: WALDEMAR REICHERT; ABOVE, PHILIP MOLOTTIS

april 2007

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City Council on a \$65-million library bond issue in 1997. Two years later he asked for—and got—a second bond initiative that included funding for police and fire stations and another \$44 million for library construction. CPL also received about \$7 million from the State of Illinois. These funds boosted the CPL capital program by \$116 million, permitting construction of 20 libraries. The remaining 32 libraries were built or renovated with a variety of funding sources from the city and state.

“Sometimes being a good steward of the taxpayers’ dollars and serving their library needs when there isn’t enough capital money means being resourceful and creative with developers, landlords, and alternative financing,” explained Dempsey.

The library has benefited from some creative financing thanks to the mayor’s insistence that all city departments work together. One branch sits on land donated by Chicago Public Schools. Others sites were purchased using TIF funds (Tax Increment Financing, which allows tax dollars to be reinvested in their taxing district). The park, fire, and police departments have also cooperated in site acquisitions.

While the city’s Public Building Commission awards contracts and oversees the building projects, Dempsey emphasizes that she and CPL’s building managers, Mort Corburn and Tim Hickey, keep a watchful eye, and that the library board has ultimate authority. “The buildings have to be welcoming and physically attractive,” she said. “That is my responsibility. The biggest mistake a director can make is to cede that responsibility.”



Visitors at the Bucktown branch can lock their bikes to reading-related racks.



The new Logan Square library was dedicated October 1, 2005.



Dempsey is closely involved in all aspects of the building program, from searching for locations—“Always walk the site”—through construction. She visits building worksites regularly, putting on a hard hat and peppering the workers with questions.

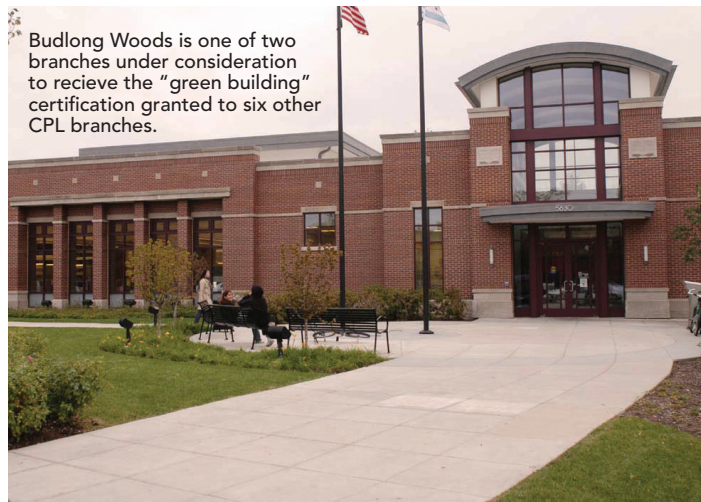
The mayor too stays personally involved, sometimes helping to negotiate land deals and attending every branch opening. “We’re top-of-mind with the mayor,” said Dempsey, noting that she sometimes receives newspaper clippings with a note from Daley asking, “Can we do this?”

“We are lucky in Chicago to have a continuity of leadership that other cities don’t have,” she continued. “We have a mayor who really loves this city. He gets the value of the library for lifelong learning. He speaks from the heart. If it’s remotely connected to lifelong learning, he wants the library to be part of it.”

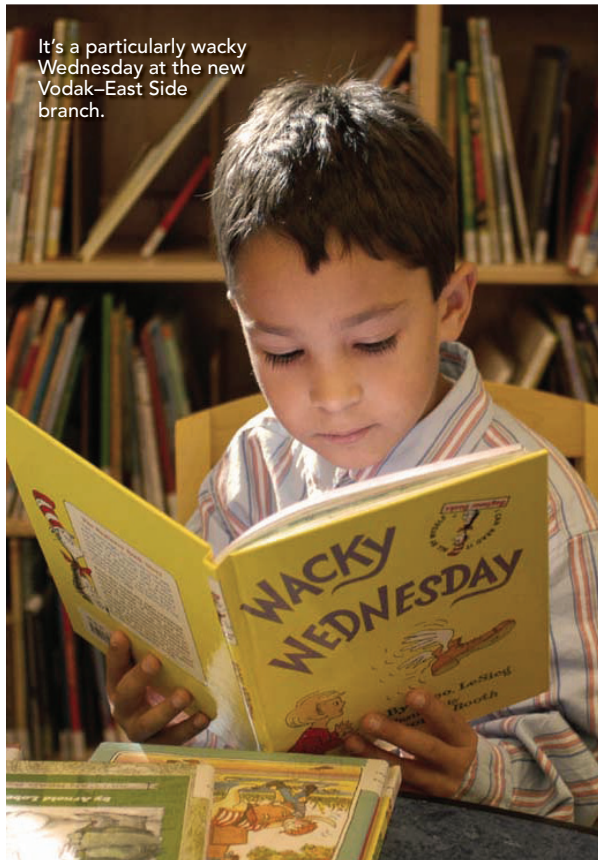
Paul H. Dykstra, secretary of the library board of directors and chair of the board’s Administration and Finance Committee, admitted he had no idea of how big the library-building project would become.

“The capital commitment is only the beginning,” he said. “Our city council, led by the mayor, has cheerfully taken on the increased operating cost. It was one of those rare things that brought unanimity. . . that libraries are terrific for a community and could have a positive effect.”

Alderman Patrick O’Connor, who has represented the 40th ward since 1984, noted that Daley benefited from a flourishing economy in the late 1990s. Daley also had the success of the city’s central library, which



Budlong Woods is one of two branches under consideration to receive the “green building” certification granted to six other CPL branches.



It’s a particularly wacky Wednesday at the new Vodak–East Side branch.



Sunlight streams into the 14,000-foot Budlong Woods branch.



opened in 1991, to build on. But O'Connor points out that "Having money is one thing. Having the vision to spend it appropriately is another. It happened here because we had a mayor who had the vision to say this is what we need to do to be a world-class city."

O'Connor's ward previously lacked a library. The new Budlong Woods branch replaced a rundown hotel in his ward. Today the library is a popular destination for children and families. "From a user point of view, it's a very good building," he explained. "It's easy to

find what you want and there's a help desk when you walk in."

Like all the new branches, Budlong Woods is a multipurpose facility. Many community groups host meetings there, as does O'Connor. It also serves as a polling place. The alderman notes with pride that a new mixed-use building across the street has copied the library's architecture. "The library set the tone for redevelopment in that area," he said. "It's been very positive."

THE DALEY NEWS

Time magazine has said Chicago's Mayor Richard M. Daley "is widely viewed as the nation's top urban executive." First elected in 1989, his bold, sometimes controversial steps have consistently included libraries, and his 2007 re-election campaign featured libraries among his accomplishments. The Chicago Public Library Foundation recently awarded Daley its first Library Champion Award for his nationally recognized and inspiring commitment to Chicago's libraries and literacy.

AMERICAN LIBRARIES: Why are you such a library booster?

DALEY: The library is really an education anchor and a community anchor, sometimes more than a school in the sense of their hours. They deal with all types and ages of people. You'll see immigrants with their children. . . people filling out their résumés, doing term papers, relaxing, reading a book. It's all part of what I think America should be.

To what do you attribute the success of Chicago's library-building program?

Thank the taxpayers of the City of Chicago. They have invested in improving education. Whether it's the library or the schools, we understand and appreciate what can pull people out of poverty.

How do you see the library's building program in economic development?

What you see is many times businesses will do something in and around the library. [For example,] they will open a coffee shop. People [realize] the city invested X amount of money,

whether it's 8 or 10 or 12 million dollars. That's a big investment. Then retail thinks, "The city is investing here. We should start investing here."

How do you respond when people ask, "Who needs libraries anymore?"

I think you have to understand what a library does. It's more than the internet, more than a bookstore. It's part of the community, an educational place for all ages to go to. To me, it's a wonderful experience to go there. In a knowledge-based

society and economy we'd better be promoting more and more libraries.

What advice do you have for other mayors and communities?

I would ask them to come to Chicago and find out what we're doing, how we're doing it, our financing, and the reaction of the public. I think they would be amazed at how they can reclaim parts of their city and how many people are there at the library.



Mayor Daley visits with a young reader at Vodak-East Side.



O'Connor's advice to other public officials: "Don't buy into the idea that because the internet exists libraries aren't a desirable commodity for your community. The ability to use them for civic purposes and to bring people any number of things is a good way to enhance any community. The library as a function is the purest form of enjoyment. It's open year-round and provides access to the world."

The system's Near North branch, which opened in 1997, has received national attention for its role in

help. One patron hosts board games after school on Wednesdays. Another leads a reading and discussion program.

"People absolutely love it," confirmed security officer Donna Claybourne. "They use it. It's a lovely place. People come in and say, 'Oh, this is it!' They're glad to have it here."

While many times larger than its two storefront predecessors, the new Bucktown-Wicker Park branch sometimes suffers baby carriage gridlock with up to 80

"Having money is one thing. Having the vision to spend it appropriately is another."

turning around a depressed, high-crime area. Ten years later, a coffee shop, hundreds of new town houses, and a new police station have been added to the busy retail area. While other city departments such as parks and police played a role, the library is widely credited for jump-starting the revitalization.

The system's newest branch, Vodak-East Side, opened in August 2006, replacing a smaller storefront branch that opened in 1974. Located on the city's far southeast side, the area is heavily populated by Hispanic immigrants. A classic example of "If you build it, they will come," the new branch's circulation in its first four months nearly equaled the former branch's statistics for its entire last year. Vodak-East Side Manager Richard McLelland points to nearby businesses that now sport spiffier looks.

Santos Nodal, a recent college graduate studying for the electrician's exam, said he is a frequent user of the new library. He remembers the old one as dark and cramped. "It wasn't a place I wanted to go to as a kid."

"Construction of a library sends a strong message: If the city cares enough to build a library, they must care about me," said Dempsey. She tells of going to vote and having an election judge—who lives in another part of the city—thank her for a new library. "We didn't used to hear 'I love the library,'" said Dempsey. "We lost a generation of library users, but they are now coming back."

The West Pullman branch, which opened in July 2005, serves a largely African-American, mixed-income community. Located in an area that previously did not have a library, there are now lines of people waiting to get in.

Branch Manager Dewana Dorsey notes that grateful residents have been quick to volunteer their

preschoolers and their parents turning out for story-times. The free Wi-Fi—available at all CPL branches—is a popular service in this neighborhood, which is well on its way to renewal.

Grand and cozy. Gracious and comfortable. Warm. Exciting. Vibrant. Solid. Soaring. Airy.

These are some of the words branch managers use to describe their libraries.

Designed in "contemporary prairie" style with brick exteriors and largely wood interiors, CPL's new and renovated branches convey a consistent image. Architectural firm Antunovich Associates designed four prototypes—ranging from about 7,000 to 16,500 square feet—to accommodate various sites and allow for economies of scale. All of the branches have clear sight lines for easy supervision. Over the past four years, the construction cost averaged at \$285 per square foot.

Each library opens into a central two-story clerestory that floods the library with light and makes the interior appear more spacious. Indeed, some people ask how to get to the nonexistent second floor. This central area contains computers, study tables, and the reference help desk with the children's room, periodicals, young adult, adult, and reference collections surrounding it.

The library's abbreviated mission statement ("Read. Learn. Discover.") is prominently embedded in the floors or walls of each new building. Rest rooms and community rooms with modern projection systems and seating for up to 125 people are located off the entrance hall. All branches are fully accessible to disabled people.

While the overall effect is consistent, the new libraries are not cookie-cutter. Each has customized



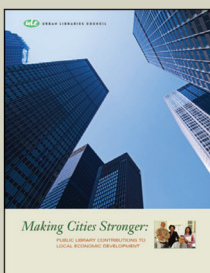
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for All Public Library Leaders

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lighting, color schemes, and furnishings, including comfy, oversized reading chairs. Distinctive touches include reading gardens (where space permits), bicycle racks in the shape of the word "books," and artwork—thanks to a Chicago requirement that all public buildings invest 1.33% of their construction or renovation budget on original art.

Each branch receives its own special collections, often in foreign languages. As part of its grand opening, each library receives \$400,000 for new materials. The materials are selected by branch staff, who know their users' needs and interests, in cooperation with the library's collection development department.

Six branches have received LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) certification from the U.S. Green Building Council, officially designating them as "green buildings." Two other branches are currently under consideration for receiving certification. Among other things, the certification recognizes a high level of indoor air quality, use of recycled materials, and energy-efficient lighting, heating, and cooling systems.

"We're really proud of not just building great libraries," said Christina Tchen, a member of the library board's Facilities Committee, "but showing how on a public budget you can build buildings that are environmentally responsible."

The library's building program is winding down.

One library—in the Beverly community in southwest Chicago—is still to be built with bond funding. Dempsey says the library will continue to explore funding to replace and update older buildings.

She sees the library's biggest challenge as raising public awareness. "We are built for everyone to use, rich and poor alike. We are critical to quality of life. We're here for lifelong learning. It's up to us to get the message out there in a consistent, positive fashion: 'Here's what we can do for you. . . your business, your family.'"

CPL's new strategic plan, *Chicago Public Library 2010*, calls for development of a marketing strategy. Dempsey said the new approach will be as critical as the last one in helping the library prepare for the future. She said a strong focus on staff development, initiated as part of the first strategic plan, will continue.

"Investing in people is the most important thing we can do," she said. "If we don't have a well-trained, competent, and confident staff, it doesn't matter how beautiful the buildings are." ■

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