



A crowd waits to get into the Clinton-Macomb Public Library's Main Library on opening day, Oct. 26, 2003. Photo provided by the Clinton-Macomb Public Library

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CMPL Main Library turns 20

By: Dean Vaglia | **C&G Newspapers** | **Published October 6, 2023**

CLINTON TOWNSHIP — In the words of Clinton-Macomb Public Library Director Larry Neal, where did the time go?

The multi-township library's main building at Romeo Plank and Canal roads turns 20 years old this October.

"Overall, it's definitely a reason to celebrate," said Neal, who came to the CMPL system as the main library was being designed. "We are now, with 20 years under our belt for the main building, seeing generations of families come to the library, so that's one of our great joys for many of the staff members who have also been here for most if not all of that time."

Beginning in 1992 as a partnership between Clinton Township and Chippewa Valley Schools, today's CMPL formed when Macomb Township replaced Chippewa Valley as a partner in 1997. Throughout its first decade, the library was based in an shopping center at Garfield and 19 Mile roads.

Everything changed for the CMPL in 1998 when voters approved a proposal to create a permanent, purpose-built library and establish satellite branches in Macomb Township and southern Clinton Township. The Library Board began touring the country for libraries to base the new building on, picking up Rochester Hills library director Christine Hage (who previously led that library's construction) to lead the CMPL's new start.

One feature planners wanted for the new building was an automated material handling system.

"That is a conveyor belt system that allows people to return items ... and have them go down a conveyor belt, get checked in and then rough-sorted depending on the area of the library that they belong to," Neal said. "We had gone to a couple of libraries around the county, because there were none in Michigan (with the system) at the time, to have a look at the systems and see how they work."

One member of the library board that was key to outfitting the new facility was Donald Green, whose connections with local figures through his Rotary Club membership brought numerous gifts to the library. Such gifts include the mural, globe, puppet theater, Pewabic tile fountain and the fireplace.

Opening day on Oct. 26, 2003, largely went off without a hitch, save for having to move \$1 million of new materials with a lift due to a water leak in the elevator shaft. Crowds poured into the new library and kicked off two decades of reading and research in Clinton Township.

As times changed, so did the CMPL. Both satellite locations would eventually find permanent buildings, and the Main Library would evolve to match two decades of technological developments. A major casualty from the rise of the digital world is the library's reference book collection, but the space once held by encyclopedias is now home to the library of things.

"We have all sorts of things from tools to slide converters (to) jewelry making starter kits so that this can be your starting point to try something out," Neal said. "If you want to try a GoPro, you don't have to buy it. Borrow it from the library, see if you like it."

Next year, the Main Library will undergo its first major refresh. The changes will mostly be limited to quality-of-life updates such as replacing worn-out carpet, installing LED lights and implementing a geothermal heating system similar to the North Branch's system, but one change will finally realize a design feature that was meant to be there from the start: a drive-up book return window.

"We had initially planned for an automated machine to deliver items on hold to make it convenient for people," Neal said. "The company that developed the automated check-in systems had developed a prototype for us here that unfortunately did not end up having enough capacity, so they took their prototype back."

The CMPL will have several events and activities on Thursday, Oct. 26, to celebrate the milestone.

"Anyone who visits the Main Library on the 26th will get a free cookie just for stopping by," said Jamie Morris, CMPL head of communications and strategy. "In addition to that, we're hosting a scavenger hunt throughout the library. We're going to have pictures of things that have happened at the Main Library over the last 20 years, and they'll be scattered throughout the building so people can go on a scavenger hunt. If they find all 20 pictures and get them in the correct order, they'll get their choice of CMPL swag."

There will also be a birthday storytime and crafts at 11 a.m. for kids.

Cookies and prizes will be available while supplies last.