Library

PROJECT SPOTLIGHT



Bullitt County Public Library

Bullitt County Showcases 21st Century Library Design

Bullitt County, located just south of Louisville, Kentucky, is growing. To keep up with the county's expansion, The Bullitt County Public Library (BCPL) purchased land for a new Main library. Looking to make the most of the space in its brand-new 45,000-square-foot central branch, BCPL partnered with Patterson Pope for storage design input.

THE PROBLEM

In 2020, Bullitt County's population topped 82,000. By the next census, the county expects growth of approximately 20 percent. That's many more residents accessing the public library. Yet the BCPL's old Ridgway Memorial Library was a land-locked building lacking space. Plus, parking was hard to find, and the structure itself needed renovation.

Looking to achieve "the most future flexibility," and to enhance its "ability to grow with Bullitt County," the BCPL decided to purchase a new, larger lot in Shepherdsville with more traffic and visibility. The library had room to double its footprint and offer more robust experiences for its target audiences of adults, families and teenagers.

As the flagship location of BCPL's five branches, the new main library was designed to provide what BCPL Associate Director Jennifer Nippert calls a "third space." The new library aims to be a place where people can be their own best selves, apart from their personal and professional spaces.

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"We're trying to show what a 21st Century library can be, and we're pretty proud of it."

Jennifer Nippert
Associate Director, Bullitt County Public Library

THE SOLUTION

The BCPL wanted to create a building that people could enjoy for decades to come. That meant moving the flagship collection to a new building while carving out space for centralized library departments and new features. This effort offered multiple opportunities for innovative storage and shelving solutions.

Accessibility was a top priority. "What we wanted to do in here was really open up a space," Nippert said. In the old, 19,000-square-foot library, separating services for adults, families and teens was difficult. Everyone was "kind of crammed in" together.

Treating the library as a blank canvas, Patterson Pope collaborated with BCPL and its architects to make the collection flow. To provide patrons with visual cues about where each collection begins and ends, the library decided to install colorful endcases. The different shelving sections match the wayfinding signage created for the building.

Throughout the library, the fixtures Patterson Pope provided help delineate space. "The collections are browsable and user-friendly," Nippert said. Plus, the shelving in the kids' area is shorter and easier for young people to scan and gradually scales up as the reader's age increases. All the library shelving is also adjustable for different size books.

"We can get things out very quickly, and the fixtures themselves are great because we can easily get around them, and we can do our maintenance on the collection pretty easily," Nippert said.

The flexibility of the space opens the library up to many different uses as well. In addition to the stacks, the library features:

- Offices for tech, HR, marketing and other county library staff
- Four small elementally-themed garden spaces
- Areas for people to have work and other meetings
- A local history room
- Makers and Digital Media labs





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THE OUTCOME

The new BCPL main library serves the many different needs of its community, which helps build relationships. "It's something that a lot of people are enjoying," Nippert said. "We're seeing the number of people here pick up." In its 2023 annual report, the BCPL recorded over 50,000 library visits.

The building itself is also earning accolades. The library won an Award of Merit from the Kentucky Chapter of the Associated Builders and Contractors in 2022 and a 2023 Kentucky Merit Award from The American Institute of Architects.

The storage adaptability is key, Nippert said. "Leave as much flexibility as you can in terms of selecting fixtures," she recommends to others considering a library renovation or new build. The BCPL, for example, had planned on housing periodicals. Instead, it opened up a Library of Things which holds unique items for checkout, such as guitars, walkie-talkies, fondue pots and power washers.

Nippert advised designing a "free-form-ish structure that can be tweaked and dressed however you want." That leaves the library with space to make adjustments as patron needs evolve. After all, that's what's going to keep the library lively deep into the 21st century.





ABOUT THE CLIENT

The Bullitt County Public Library's (BCPL) central location in Shepherdsville, Kentucky, is a community staple. In September, 2022, a new Central Library location opened to the public. The 45,000-square-foot library featured more space, greater flexibility, and fresh concepts. New features include anytime pickup lockers, maker and digital media labs, play spaces for children, gaming areas for teens, and rooms available for reservation.

