

Libraries and Kitchens: Both take longer to remodel than promised

From the Director, Ginger Saha

“Everything takes longer than it takes.” So goes the caption on a cartoon depicting construction workers discussing the building plans for Rome. “One, maybe two days,” says one to the other. As I write this column, I am convinced of the truth of this law, at least when it comes to renovations! Anyone who has redone a kitchen or bathroom knows that the job will take 50% longer than estimated (guaranteed?). The same holds true for the renovation of the Health Center Library.

As previous columns have discussed, this has been a combination of “plant” projects -- upgrades of the air handlers, installation of a fire suppression sprinkler system, re-ballasting of the ceiling lights – and “public” projects – new wall-to-wall carpeting, custom-designed study and computer carrels, refurbished group study rooms, a curved wood and Corian® circulation/reference desk, black leather lounge furniture, and a state-of-the-art training room. Planning began early in 2002, and construction began right after Christmas. The first months saw dramatic changes -- closing the 2nd floor to the public so we could remove all the furniture and build a containment wall around the book stacks; removing 3 windows and sawing out a concrete pillar to accommodate a scaffold from Circle Drive to the Library’s 2nd floor; dismantling and assembling new air handlers – one mechanical room at a time; threading football fields’ worth of pipe through the ceiling for the sprinkler system. Most work was done at night, and the staff would come in to work in the morning and inspect the progress. Things were moving along!

We shifted to day work in early June to install the carpet. This required moving every single bookshelf – fully loaded! – off to the side to clear the area to be carpeted, and then moving the shelves into their new positions which had to comply with spacing requirements dictated by the Americans with Disabilities Act. Given the varying sizes of support columns, and the fact that shelving is a different size on each floor, this was a major challenge!! It also meant we had to close the library for a few weeks. The new ILLiad online interlibrary loan request system proved its worth as we obtained hundreds of articles from other libraries because our collection was inaccessible. When we reopened, patrons had to come through the Library’s Technical Processing Room and be escorted out into the furniture-less reading room and the not-altogether-in-order stacks. It turns out they loved the personal attention, and were disappointed when we encouraged them to try it alone! But, the schedule was starting to slip a bit -- we were supposed to be finished at the end of June...

In July the study carrels and tables were delivered, despite a non-functioning freight elevator. Then study chairs and lounge furniture arrived. The glass panels and door at the entrance were installed, as was the book security system. The wood ceiling tiles and “halo” lights went in. More challenges were starting to emerge, however, as delivery dates for the millwork pieces for circulation, reference, and “the computer corral” were pushed back. By September, when these critical service components were delivered, there remained considerable problems to solve “in the field.” The construction craftsmen were up to the challenge, however, and as you read this, the Library has regained full functionality, and a much more beautiful look. For this we are grateful to the generous donors and the contractors who made it happen. Come see us!