

Star-Telegram

Downtown Arlington library closes for good

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Eileen Liu came to take pictures on the George W. Hawkes Central Library's last day to be open on Tuesday. She has many good memories with her children at the library. JOYCE MARSHALL / STAR-TELEGRAM

ARLINGTON — Feeling nostalgic, Kathie Crider and her son and daughter arrived early Tuesday morning to browse the shelves and take one last look around George W. Hawkes Central Library, the place they have spent countless hours over the years picking out books, listening to storytime and making memories as a family.

“We wanted to come say goodbye,” said Crider, whose family has patronized the library for more than 20 years.

The Central Library, which has stood in the heart of downtown at 101 E. Abram St. for 40 years, closed permanently Tuesday night. Private developers plan to raze the library early next year to make way for a \$43 million mixed-use development featuring apartments, retail, restaurants,

offices and shops in its place. Across the street, the city will build a larger library just north of City Hall that is expected to open by 2017.

In the children's area, Emily Crider, 17, and her 12-year-old brother, Caleb, fondly recalled the many puppet shows, magic shows and arts-and-crafts and music programs they've attended at the library, where they also received their first library cards.

"It's like they are ripping out a chunk of my childhood," Emily Crider said. "It's where we spent most of our summers growing up."

Though some are sad to see the library go, others are looking forward to the services and amenities the future library will bring.

Design work is underway for the 80,000-square-foot building. The city has spent several years gathering public input for the project, which officials say will help the library better serve the community's needs for technology, meeting space, educational programming and recreation.

A comprehensive study found that the existing 63,000-square-foot concrete and steel building needs millions of dollars in repairs and is no longer large enough to meet the public's demands.

"Sadly, I don't think this particular library has ever really functioned as a central library. It has functioned more like a downtown branch," Arlington Libraries Director Cary Siegfried said. "What a central library should be is a special facility that offers services you can't get in your branch libraries."

The future library will become more of a place where people want to be and not just a place to store books, Siegfried said. It will feature special collections, various types of technology, cultural programs and inviting public working space.

"People who are living in the downtown area that want to get out of their apartment and be with other people – they may go to the Central Library and have a cup of coffee, work on their laptop or meet a friend," Siegfried said. "It will be the community's living room."

The project will cost about \$25 million, which includes construction of a new City Council chamber and a public plaza. Arlington expects to receive about \$4.2 million in ground-lease and parking-lease revenue from the private development project, named 100 Center, to help offset the library costs.

Though the new library won't open for two years, a temporary downtown library service center will open up Jan. 13 near Cooper and Division streets to serve residents' needs. The Central Express facility, 200 N. Cooper St., will feature a limited selection of popular new fiction, nonfiction, audiobooks and children's books as well as 16 public computers.

Patrons can also request items from the Central Library's collection, most of which will be stored in a climate-controlled warehouse, for pickup at the temporary site or any branch.

"It will get us through the next couple of years," Siegfried said.

Abatement and demolition of the old library could start as soon as February.

"I'm going to miss coming here," said MaJuan Johnson, 37, a longtime patron who stopped by Tuesday. "It's going to be different to walk down Abram and not see the library."

Many of the library's public computers will be distributed to branch libraries. So will some of the artwork, including the kneeling-boy statue beneath the central staircase and the boy-and-dog bronze statute on the lawn, Siegfried said.

The popular genealogy collection is expected to be moved temporarily to the Northeast Branch Library, 1905 Brown Blvd., until the new library opens.



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CENTRAL EXPRESS

Though the George W. Hawkes Central Library is now closed to the public, its book drop will remain open until Jan. 12. The Central Express, a temporary downtown library service center at 200 N. Cooper St., will open Jan. 13. Its operating hours will be 9 a.m. to 7 p.m. Monday through Thursday and 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Friday and Saturday.

The East Branch Library will extend its hours and be open from 9 a.m. to 9 p.m. with the closing of the Central Library.

Arlington's future Central Library is expected to open just north of City Hall in 2017.

For more info, visit www.arlingtonlibrary.org (<http://www.arlingtonlibrary.org/>).