

NORTHLAND PUBLIC LIBRARY--AN OVERVIEW--1968-1985

"THE MOST IMPORTANT LIBRARY IN THE STATE, AT THE MOMENT, IS ONE THAT HAS NO BUILDING AND NO BOOKS," quoted the Pittsburgh Post Gazette in an article published August 4, 1967. This most important library was Northland Public Library, the first library in the state of Pennsylvania to be sponsored by not one community but four. This statement reflects the being and essence of Northland--something new, something growing, and something never standing still. Other areas of the North Hills were more established during the 1950's than the area that grew so rapidly along the McKnight Road. The octopus of a new connecting four-lane highway did not allow for much planning as businesses and home homes mushroomed along the way. But where begins a sense of community, there becomes a sense of centralization--a place where the community can gather informally to grow.

As early as the 1950's there were complaints among local residents concerning the lack of library service in the North Hills. These complaints led to a Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh's bookmobile stop at the Northway Mall. As the years passed, and the use of the bookmobile grew, the complaints again began to be heard. **THE NORTH HILLS COMMUNITY NEEDED A LIBRARY.**

In 1963, Keith Doms, then the director of the Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh prepared a study which outlined the plan for what was eventually to be Northland Public Library. His very original concept of a multi-municipal library was based on the cooperation of seven communities; Ross, McCandless, Franklin Park, Bradford Woods, Pine, Marshall, and West View. As Keith Doms put it: "Together, these seven municipalities can pool their resources to create a quality library--with the exception of Ross Township, the other communities are too small to support a public library at this time. However, it is not likely that it would exceed minimum standards on a 'go it alone' basis since per unit service costs are proportionately higher for smaller service areas than for larger ones."

Doms's document entitle The Northland Public Library, a Cooperative Library, became the cornerstone for eventual development of the current library.

On July 3, 1963, representatives from most North Hills communities attended a meeting at the Northway Mall to study the possibilities of establishing a library in this area. Mr. Doms had been speaking to municipal officials urging them to send representatives to that meeting. Mrs.

Strang of McCandless, leader of the library movement, accompanied him on these visits.

Outcome of that meeting brought an estimate of \$59,000 to maintain a central library or one dollar for each of the 59,000 people it expected to serve.

By April of 1964, Ross commissioners had decided to put the issue of the library on the township's ballot and to let the people decide whether or not they wanted to pay the cost. Decision day for the library was November 8, 1966, when the Ross voters, largest of the population centers, voted whether or not they would pay for support of a cooperative community library.

From 1963 to 1967, many hours of work were invested by a variety of interested citizens. Again the birth of the library had to be a community effort. Thirteen men and women were named to represent seven municipalities considering the library. Civic organizations, including the North Hills Ministerial Association, North Hills and North Allegheny School Districts and the McCandless Lions Club, worked hard in support of the library.

A defeat in Ross Township would spell the end of the joint community venture. Keith G. Swensen headed a committee of volunteers to push the "YES" vote in Ross. When the November 8 votes were counted, Ross voters had approved the library by a 55% margin, (6,573 in favor to 5,361 against.) By February, 1967, it became apparent that West View would not sign the library agreement and Pine Township supervisors said a postcard poll of residents showed the majority opposed the library venture. Marshall Township was also not interested.

The Northland Public Library Board of Directors representing the four remaining communities met for the first time and on April 10, 1976, they signed a contract which officially initiated the Northland Public Library. Serving on the first board were: Dr. Robert Lord, Ross Township, President; Mr. John Nutter, McCandless, Treasurer; Mrs. Jane Kehoe, Franklin Park, Vice President; and Mr. Eric Lavery, Bradford Woods, Secretary. All were appointed by their respective municipalities to select a site for the new library and to hire staff. Of the possible sites under consideration, the Three Degree Road location was selected.

A federal grant of \$135,000 and a check of \$1,278 from Northland Library Friends helped open the library on October 6, 1968 with Dale W. Craig as its first director, seven staff members, and 16,000 volumes in a building of 10,000 square feet. The community response was overwhelming—shelves were wiped

clean. It was not unusual for a patron entering the library to be asked to wait for a little while—books would probably be returned so that others could check them out. From this immediate demand the library began to formulate a policy of future library use.

WHAT IS NORTHLAND PUBLIC LIBRARY'S BASIC GOAL? It is to be an information center which gives primary service to those with no alternate library service, mainly adults and preschoolers, with secondary emphasis on school and college students. With this statement the library began to grow and to meet creatively the community demands.

In the first three months of operation the staff registered more than 11,000 library users and circulated more than 44,000 items. The next few years were ones of growth and development. In 1969 another federal grant allowed the library to hire two more professional employees for one year. The municipalities appointed board members to more fairly represent the communities by population. In 1971, a new director came to Northland, Laura Shelley. Along with the new director came new dynamics to respond to community demand. A 1972 Pittsburgh Press interview called her the "car salesman of the library world." The library continued to add more books to its collection but not fast enough to keep pace with community request. The library began to offer programs such as story hours in the morning and family film programs at night. No one could have predicted the phenomenal success.... In five years, Northland's statistics showed 50,716 volumes owned, 35,469 people with library cards, and 307,704 items circulated.

THE COMMUNITY DEMANDED AND THE LIBRARY RESPONDED. More programs were added to show that the library was involved with the community and was aware of its needs—reading clubs, writing workshops, community carnivals, pet shows, travelogue programming, election night television results, school visits, the addition of non-print media.

Northland Library never needed to sell itself. The North Hills community was thirsting for whatever new adventures the library could offer. It soon became apparent that the rented quarters could never satisfy the public demand for both services and collection development. Long waiting lists for titles, cramped quarters, and serious library users having to compete for space with preschool programming became a nightmare for both the staff and the library board. Within ten years, Northland's collection and patron use had increased to the point where the rented quarters and the fifty-car parking lot were totally inadequate. More than 75,000 volumes were being housed in a building with shelving space for 45,000. This only possible because circulation had reached

more than 360,000 items a year and at least half of the collection was always checked out at any given time. Circulation had **DOUBLED** in the first ten years of operation!

The board of Northland Public Library recognized the growth of the library and the need for permanent quarters. As early as 1975, they began looking at alternatives for the library's future., as the lease at Three Degree Road was to expire in 1978. Two strong community leaders, Frank and Betty Hess were asked to chair a building committee which, with the help of Jack Ross and John Schonder of Ross and Schonder Architects, studied numerous possible sites and potential building options. After much discussion and study, the Northland Public Library Board decided that a 30,000 square foot building built on a 4.8 acre site donated by the North Allegheny School District was the wisest long range choice.

Three of the municipal councils, McCandless, Bradford Woods and Franklin Park, approved the site and agreed to plan for funding a new facility. Ross officials objected when a location other than Ross Township was suggested, because they felt their residents would be too far from the new library. A "Save the Library" committee aimed at Ross residents was spearheaded by Hobart Richey and David Westhead. Volunteers made a door-to-door canvas urging people to cast a **"YES"** vote on a November referendum. **AGAIN THE COMMUNITY RESPONDED.** This time the Ross voters approved the new library by a 64% margin (7,901 in favor to 4,469 against) almost a 10% increase over the original referendum to establish a library in the North Hills.

Groundbreaking ceremonies were held on August 3, 1977. Between August, 1977 and the grand opening in October, 1978, the staff worked at a frenzied pace. Moving into a new facility was more than a physical move. Increased circulation had placed demands for more speed and efficiency than the manual card-sorting circulation system could handle. The outcome of serious study, consultant work, and staff evaluation was a decision to computerize the circulation system. The decision to automate was made more difficult also, because fewer than 200 libraries in the nation were computerized in any fashion. Finding a computer system which could meet the North Hills users' needs became a critical decision. Universal Library Systems out of Vancouver, Canada, seemed to have the best library product available. In order to convert the collection, every item had to be "bar-coded" and every library user had to be re-registered for the new automated system. Staff had to be trained to use terminals and input information into the computer.

An organization NEW PLACE (an acronym for Northland's Expanding World--Public Library Acquisitions, Collection and Equipment) was formed by the Friends of Northland Library. The main idea: local residents helping the new Northland and each other. Local civic clubs, garden clubs, parent-teacher organizations and hobbyists donated money for new equipment and collection development.

The director and staff worked and reworked plans for the most efficient way to move a collection of 70,000 items to its new location. Again the community of library users was called upon for help. They were asked to check-out as many items as possible from the old building and to return them to the new building at the time of opening. Scores of community volunteers donated hundreds of hours of time and muscle to "move the library." Bright red T-shirts were seen throughout the community with the words--"**NORTHLAND PUBLIC LIBRARY--A MOVING EXPERIENCE.**" It was. Staff and volunteers worked for two weeks from 8:00 in the morning until midnight each day to ready the new building for its grand opening, displaying a phenomenal commitment from the community for its public library.

On October 6, 1978, exactly ten years from the original opening, the **NEW** Northland was unveiled to its awaiting public. Grand opening ceremonies included a ribbon cutting ceremony, tours, songs, story times, puppet shows, dance demonstrations and craft exhibitions.

The two-story structure, three times larger than the building on Three Degree Road, covers 30,000 square feet. Its cost was \$1.8 million for construction and equipment. It was financed by a one mill tax hike in the four supporting municipalities for the first seven years. The funding plan was to hold a private sale of bonds with a local bank and to repay the bank at the rate of one mill from each municipality over a seven-year period/1978-1984. Because the municipalities paid their millage on a 1977 through 1983 schedule and because of the interest earned on the account, it was possible to clear the loan with only six years of payments by the four municipalities instead of seven. The effective interest rate for the bond sale was 1.75%.

The new building has a ground entrance on both levels. The first floor houses public meeting rooms, administrative office, and the Popular Reading Library which includes current books, paperbacks, magazines, records, and audio-visual equipment. The Young Adult Department and the Children's Department which features an arts and crafts area and

special story-telling/puppet theater are also located on the ground level. The second level houses the core of Adult Services, including the bulk of Northland's adult book collection, a business section, a career area, pamphlet and magazine file, and circulating art. Adult Services and Circulation offices are found on the upper level, as well. Copy machines, typewriters, and special equipment are also available for the public at Northland.

Northland Library is more than a building, however. It is a combination of facilities and services which reflect the pride of its community residents.

Northland operates on the basis of several goals created when the new building opened and services expanded. Northland Library provides, on equal terms, free library services to all individuals and groups in its service area; Ross Township, the Town of McCandless, and the boroughs of Franklin Park and Bradford Woods. These four municipalities provide annual appropriations for support of the library. Northland serves this community as a source of materials for educational, cultural, and informational purposes, as well as for the creative use of leisure time. Since financial limitations prevent equal emphasis on all aspects of these goals, the library recognizes that its primary concern must be on positive contributions toward the development of the individual as a citizen through the provision of educational and informational materials.

In accordance with the American Library Association's "Library Bill of Rights", Northland has attempted to build a wide and varied collection of books and other library materials. Northland pursues an active program of cooperation with other libraries in Pennsylvania including participation in a statewide district center library program which provides increased resources. It also accepts responsibility for the direct communication of ideas, seeking thereby to direct the individual toward a continuous learning process through use of books and related materials. It has become a cultural community resource center. With few agencies available in the North Hills capable of addressing the many and diverse demands of the community, the library has become a focal point. The director and the staff are constantly assessing the needs of its users and adjusting services accordingly.

Library programming has increased over the years, offering Art Festivals cosponsored with the North Hills and the North Allegheny school districts, microcomputer fairs, annual book sales, art classes, music recitals, garden and flower shows, town meetings with state and federal officials, a community career fair, chess and game tournaments, fitness programs, cooking and craft demonstrations, investment programs, income tax assistance for the elderly, dance and theater programs, a writer's guild, and book discussion groups. The Children's Department increased preschool programming, afterschool programs, summer reading clubs, and specialized programming to meet the public demands. Over 3,000 children and young people participate in the children's programs each year.

Local agencies and organizations reserve the library meeting rooms to offer community services and information. Some of the organizations include: The American Cancer Society, League of Women's Voters, Central Blood Bank, Western Pennsylvania Heart Association, Allegheny County Chapter of the Red Cross, Environmental Allergy Group, Northway Coin Club, American Association of University Women, Pittsburgh Miniature Society, North Hills Toastmistress Unit, Association for Research and Enlightenment, Inc., North Pittsburghers' Quilters Guild, Christmas Seal League, Longvue Garden Club, Ingomar Garden Club, Northern Area Chemical People Task Force, North Hills Area Chamber of Commerce, "Kids on the Block", and the North Allegheny Horseman's Association.

The period of time between the opening in 1978 and the present has been another one of growing, and not without some pains. Consider the following statistics:

	1968	1973	1978	1983	1984
POPULATION SERVED	59,000	62,000	67,000	68,000	68,851
REGISTERED BORROWERS	11,479	34,977	*15,589	41,830	46,500
	(Sept./Dec.)				
SIZE OF BUILDING	10,000	10,000	30,000	30,000	30,000
SIZE OF COLLECTION	16,000	50,716	75,000	94,104	103,000
HOURS OPENED	47	47	66	66	66
		(51 in 1974)			
CIRCULATION	44,070	250,000	355,798	574,968	618,000
STAFF	9.7	16.2	30.6	28.3	32.5

(F.T.E.'S)

*This figure and the figures for the following year reflect patrons who have **ACTIVE** library cards. It is important to note that cards are renewed annually. Registrations continue to increase at a 9% annual rate.

The state of Pennsylvania's Library Association ranked Northland as follows:

BY POPULATION:	24th of 404 libraries in 1977 26th 442 libraries in 1982
BY COLLECTION:	36th of 403 libraries in 1977 33rd of 442 libraries in 1982
BY CIRCULATION:	15th of 403 libraries in 1977 9th of 442 libraries in 1982
BY TOTAL EXPENDITURE	26th of 407 libraries in 1977 22nd of 442 libraries in 1982

Projections show that Northland Library's:

Square footage had increased from 1977 to 1984:	300%
Hours opened to the public from 1977 to 1984	20%
Patrons actively using the library from 1977 to 1984:	199%
Collection development reaching from 1977 to 1984:	35%
Staff increase just barely from 1977 to 1984:	33%
Circulation soars from 1977 to 1984:	42%

It is evident that Northland Library's growth has outpaced the ability of its funding bodies to respond to its financial requirements. The director and library staff have organized several creative fundraising efforts to supplement its income in the past several years. At least eight applications have been submitted for L.S.C.A. grants. Five were selected.

A. \$57,320 and in kind conversion services in two grants to form, establish, and enhance a multitype library data base network between Northland Public Library, the North Allegheny School District and potentially North Hills Passavant Hospital and LaRoche college.

B. \$10,000 for assistance in the implementation of a collection management and development plan drawn up by the Northland Library staff.

C. \$16,628 to establish a microcomputer resource center which would teach basic computer skills to those in our community who have no other access to micro's.

D. \$20,000 for three public libraries--Northland, Shaler/North Hills, and Sewickley--to cooperatively develop a rotating VCR collection.

For additional revenue, areas in the library are now being leased to the Pennsylvania Job Service and to the Pennsylvania Photo ID Center. Meeting rooms can now be rented for a small service charge.

Additional fund-raisers which create additional publicity for the library but small return on time and expenditures include: semi-annual book sales, autograph auctions, community library and craft fairs, and most recently, co-operative venture with the League of Women Voters; the publication of INVO V, a community resource directory.

The income from these endeavors is desperately needed in order to

allow the library to continue its expected high level of service, to increase the size of its collection, to meet community demands, and to maintain a \$1.8 million dollar building so that major repairs and renovations do not become necessary. Yet the time and effort expended by staff members on these projects takes them away from their primary service functions, creating a paradoxical decrease in overall library effectiveness in the eyes of community residents.

The board and director of the library constantly search for ways to alleviate this strain. They have started the establishment of a reserve fund for continuous building and equipment maintenance.

The need for additional support has now become apparent to outside community agencies. In 1984, ZONTA, a business and professional women's organization offered to start a fund drive for new materials in the library.

This has resulted in the ZONTA North Library Foundation which in only a few months received more than \$2,500 in donations. In 1985 The Northland Public Library Foundation was begun. It will continue Zonta's efforts and it is hoped increase them.

A community is reflected in its library and a good public library reflects its community. Fifteen years of experience shows that this is so. Following is a quote from The North Hills News Record editorial column on Northland Library's fifteenth anniversary. **"CONGRATULATIONS NORTHLAND LIBRARY!** When it comes to community cooperation, there may be no finer example than that of Northland Library. Northland, 300 Cumberland Road, McCandless is the only library in the state which is proportionately funded by four communities, Ross, McCandless, Bradford Woods, and Franklin Park.

During the library's 15 years of existence there have been times when budgets have been disputed and the shares due from each community have been debated. That is to be expected. But Northland has grown to its 93,000 volume, 30,000 square-foot size because the problems can be worked out."

And so starting as "The most important library in the state with no building and no books" Northland has become a struggle and an inspiration well worth the fight.

Currently, the board, director, and staff are excited about the formation of a citizen's support group The Advocates. This group is being organized to become an active voice within the community. This group will say that they do care about their library, they do wish its continuous growth, and that they will support this growth through experience, financial efforts and the belief that Northland Public Library is a vital organ in continuous community growth.

The twentieth anniversary for the library is not that far away. The library's future rests in the hands of the community, its staff, and its leaders. We all trust that we will not be disappointed.

NOTE: The library is owned and operated by the Northland Public Library Authority, a municipal authority chartered by the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. The NPLA and the library are governed by a Board of Directors consisting of six unpaid members, who are appointed to five-year terms by the elected officials of the four supporting municipalities. The board is the policy-making body of the institution.

As stated in the Authority's bylaws, the board's primary responsibilities include selection and appointment of the director of the library; promotion of library interest; securing of funds adequate for a progressive, expanding program, and control of library funds, property and equipment. Subject to existing statutes and ordinances, it has the power to determine the rules and regulations governing library service and personnel.

Regular meetings of the board are public and are held on the second Tuesday of each month. The board functions under a formula for voting which gives each municipality a vote for each 5,000 population or part thereof. Thus Ross' two representatives each cast four votes or a total of eight for Ross since its population is over 35,000. Bradford Woods' one representative casts one vote for its portion of 5,000.

The board operates the library under a contractual agreement among the four municipalities. This contract calls for the board to submit annual budget requests based upon a per capita figure for the library's general operating budget. This allocation is then paid to the library on a quarterly basis.