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More space for both people and books. An improved technology center. Better reference service. And a welcoming atmosphere. Those are just some of the things the **new Darien Library** will offer.

"We're not just building a **library**," said Louise Berry, executive director of the **library**. "We're building one of the great **libraries** of the future."

Planning for the **new library**, to be built on a 2.23-acre parcel on the corner of the Post Road and Hecker Avenue, was a threeyear process that began in 1999. Until the planning progressed, Berry said she did not realize that the 112-year-old **library** was not serving the community the way it should despite two additions to the building it has occupied at 35 Leroy Ave., since 1957.

The 26,000 square foot structure is too small for a collection that boasts more than 180,000 items, the work spaces and offices are cramped and there is not enough parking for the roughly 1,250 daily visitors.

Berry said at 54,000 square feet, the **new library** will address the shortcomings of the existing structure.

"We've done a tremendous amount of research," she said. "We got a lot of input from the community about how the **library** should function in the future."

Designed by Peter Gisolfi Associates of Hastings-on- Hudson, N.Y., the proposed **library** will have an outdoor reading garden beyond which will lie a "streetscape"-style lobby and cafe.

"It will have a retail feel to it in terms of it being a place where people gather, but it will have the cozy, friendly feel the current **library** has," Berry said.

The **new library** will also have different environments for the various uses.

"Right now we have one noisy area," Berry said.

On the main floor will be the busier attractions - fiction section, audio books, **new** releases, the children's room with a toddler space and an auditorium with tiered seating for 170 people.

Upstairs, along with the nonfiction section, magazine reading room, financial center, visitors will find an expanded reference room and information desk where individuals can better confer with the librarians and access the latest resources in a private setting.

"We think reference services have evolved," Berry said. "We no longer get short questions for things like the dump hours or the names of the seven dwarfs. We have bigger questions. People will be able make an appointment with a reference person to get them answered."

If someone is feeling the need to "get away," she said the best place to go is the mezzanine. There, people can create their own little space to read or do work in one of the quiet study rooms.

With an increasing number of people working from home, the **new library** will offer small/home office assistance with access to everything from computers and software to printing services and office supplies. Joining the "SoHo" area on the lower level will be the art gallery, power **library**, an updated technology center, more computer work stations, smart study rooms and a teen space.

"One of the overriding themes of the whole **library** is similar to that in 'Great Good Place' by Ray Oldenburg in which he talks about how everyone has three places - a place to love, a place to work and a third place that is a great, good place where people gather to meet friends," Berry said. "The **Darien Library** is already that place. Eighty-five percent of the people in town have a card, everyone comes through the **library**. The **new library** will allow a better place for that."

To achieve that better place, the **library's** board of trustees, long-range planning committee and staff are relying on donations from individuals, local businesses, corporations, town organizations and foundations to help raise 22.5 million of the project's estimated \$26-million price tag. The remaining \$3.5 million will be covered by the sale of the present **library** building.

So far, the private capital campaign, headed by Kim Huffert and George Wyper, has generated \$17 million since it kicked off last May when the plans for the **new library** were unveiled to past trustees and friends. They are hoping get the rest of the funding through a public campaign to be launched next spring in conjunction with the **library's** groundbreaking.

Prior to that, the **library** will hold a silent/live art auction, entitled "Quiet Places, Gathering Spaces" to reflect the atmosphere of the future **library**, at the **Darien** Community Association house on Oct. 14. The invitation- only event will feature about 100 paintings by prominent local artists, including Gayle Asher, Peter Arguimbau and Robert Anderson.

All net proceeds will benefit the **library** project as will money from a children's musical event in November.

"We didn't tell the artists they have to paint something about books, computers or technology. We told them to paint what they feel the **library** encompasses," said Margot Hand, co-chair of the art auction event committee with Peggy Hersam and Karen Elders. "If they find a way to encompass that with their own style that's fine. At the same time, a landscape painting helps contribute to being contemplative or learning."

Having an art auction made sense since, according to Elders, the **library** has always had a good relationship with the artists in the community.

"The **new library** will have an atrium with an art gallery and right now artwork is displayed in the main reading room, which changes on a monthly basis," she said.

According to Alan Gray, head of technology, technical services and planning for the **library**, people are going to be "stunned" to see all that the future **library** is going to have, particularly since it is going to include the things they have wanted for a long time.

"What is very unique about our **library** are the services we're bringing to the **library**," Gray said "It's been designed from the inside out. It is a product of four or five years of work."

Berry said work on the **new library** is scheduled to culminate with an opening date of September 2008.

"It's so exciting," Berry said. "It's going to be an unbelievable gift to the town."  
Caption:

IN THE WORKS - With a basement, two full floors and a mezzanine, the **new Darien Library**, shown above from Hecker Avenue, will provide plenty of space for its current collection of 180,000 items; a meeting room that holds 170 people; an expanded reference center and a cafe, among other things.

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