

As a child, Denise Graham was an avid book borrower at the Carnegie Library's Homewood branch. Now, as manager, she has presided over a \$3.5 million makeover that preserves the character of the nearly century-old institution. The design by Pfaffmann + Associates also provides such fresh features as more daylight, a more open floor plan and a new auditorium to make the local library an inviting community living room.



THE NEXT CHAPTER

**NEW AND RENOVATED
LIBRARIES IN PITTSBURGH ARE
ADDING VITALITY TO THEIR
NEIGHBORHOODS NOW
AND OFFERING HOPE FOR
EDUCATIONAL AND ECONOMIC
GAINS IN THE FUTURE.**

BY THOMAS BUELL, JR.

PHOTOGRAPHY

BY DENNIS MARSICO

Denise Graham strikes you as a natural fit for her job running the Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh's Homewood branch.

She grew up in the neighborhood back in the '60s and '70s and remembers many happy hours spent in the library as a girl, checking out books, reading and passing the time with friends. She also worked in the branch while she was in library school.

"I've grown up in this library, really," she says, raising her eyes to the familiar high ceilings and varnished woodwork. "I came from a family of readers, and I spent a lot of time here."

Named branch manager in 2004, Graham lives a 10-minute walk away, and many times during that brief pedestrian commute in the morning or evening, neighborhood kids will see her, wave and say, "Hi, Library Lady."

Still, nothing quite prepared her for that moment when she climbed the grand steps, walked through the stone archway of the 97-year-old Homewood



library and saw the results of a \$3.5 million renovation for the first time. “My first impression was, ‘I could live here.’”

“It was a beautiful library before, but the renovations brought out a lot of hidden gems,” she says. “A lot of people say the library is so homey now. They like to come in and just sit.”

But Graham’s also a member of a generation of librarians described as tech-savvy, culturally literate and perpetually curious in a recent *New York Times* article, “A Hipper Crowd of Shushers.” So she’s enthusiastic that the library offers more than a comfortable place to relax.

“I was going to say that we have a little bit of everything, but we have a *lot* of everything, and it’s not just books. We have CDs and DVDs, and books on tape and Internet access, and so much more.”

In the past five years, Homewood and six other libraries in the 19-branch Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh system have undergone major renovations as part of a capital campaign to raise \$55 million by the end of next year—the first such fundraising effort in the library’s history. The ambitious effort has received the

support of The Heinz Endowments, other local philanthropies and the state of Pennsylvania.

Each refurbishing has its own character, often reflecting the neighborhood in which the library is located. In most cases, the updates not only have increased the buildings’ aesthetic appeal but also have helped attract more visitors to the libraries and provided an emotional lift—with a potential economic boost—to their communities.

The Endowments’ recent two-year grant of \$2 million is intended to buttress a third area, education, by helping fund construction or renovation projects at three libraries expected to be important partners with nearby “accelerated learning academies.” The redesigned schools are a major part of the Pittsburgh Public Schools’ reform efforts.

And the library system’s track record with branch improvements so far has been encouraging.

The Homewood branch, for example, re-opened in 2003 after an eight-month upgrade that included restoration of the building’s original high, multi-paned windows and leaded-glass skylight. The

woodwork, which looks like oak but some historic preservationists say could be chestnut, was polished to a glassy shine. The renovations were designed to enhance the library’s classic look of stately mansion and provide needed structural upgrades, such as a new roof, an elevator, handicapped-accessible restrooms and an updated 300-person auditorium.

“I really, really like that they took the balcony down over the stacks on the first floor because it blocked off the natural light,” says Graham. “The building didn’t gain an inch of square footage, but that made the library look so much bigger.”

The improvements also included touches reflecting the unique character of the Homewood community. One example is an almond-shaped table with an African zebra wood frame and a light fixture inspired by the trunk-swollen baobab tree that sits in the center of the expanded African-American section. That collection contains more than 12,000 popular and historical items.

The library stands out as an anchor of stability in a neighborhood that has witnessed a slow and steady decline since the days when it was home to



millionaires. (Andrew Carnegie himself once lived in Homewood.) Over the course of a month, it hosts dozens of groups and clubs: teen reading programs, homework clubs, book discussion groups, crafting groups, story time for preschoolers and music workshops. In the summer, there's a jazz concert on the front steps every Wednesday night, and local groups have staged plays, musicals and concert performances in the auditorium.

"The community has come back to this library in amazing numbers because people saw that the [Carnegie Library] administration was committed to keeping the library in this location and restoring it to its former glory," Graham says.

Another updated branch is in Pittsburgh's Brookline neighborhood, where \$2.9 million was spent to reflect community desires for an open, inviting space for children, teens, seniors and other neighborhood groups. The 1950s-era building was given a new look by moving a separate tanning salon business out of the second floor and creating a two-story open gallery at the front of the building. Large, exterior windows on

both levels, and comfortable couches and chairs, create the feel of an expansive, contemporary living room. The welcoming atmosphere draws neighborhood residents for book discussion groups, computer classes and the more social "Craft and Chat" program.

Sporting an even more modern, almost "urban-chic" appearance is the Squirrel Hill branch that sits atop a real estate office and a parking garage on the bustling corner of Murray and Forbes avenues in the heart of the neighborhood business district. Its \$4.3 million upgrade includes a 30-foot glass cube entrance at street level, a glass-encased elevator and glass exterior walls at the front and one side of the library that allow natural light to pour in. Beneath exposed ductwork and I-beams, the bright, bold colors of the lightweight, movable furniture and carpeted sections further generate a sense of vibrancy. Visitors flock to the library for activities such as parent-child reading groups, yoga classes and a knitting workshop.

Library officials cite the renovations as the reason for sharp increases in library

usage in the past several years.

Circulation rose system-wide by an average of 28 percent between 2002 and 2005, according to a study by Carnegie Mellon University's Center for Economic Development. At the Homewood branch, it has jumped more than 80 percent since its renovation, while at the Brookline and Squirrel Hill branches, the circulation increases have been 16 percent and 13 percent, respectively.

Jessica Clark, manager of the Brookline branch, which has been credited with helping shore up that neighborhood's central business district, notes that, in addition to programs for families and children, the library is attracting more and more of the city's immigrant population.

"We have a teen volunteer program that's so popular that we already have a waiting list for the new school year," she adds. "I'm amazed."

Among those making the cut was 13-year-old Stephanie Cato, who enjoys the Brookline library "because it has a lot of cool things" such as a teen section with beanbag chairs and copies of the Japanese



With mat in hand, Heidi Norman of Point Breeze heads to a yoga class at the Squirrel Hill branch of Pittsburgh's Carnegie Library system. The \$4.7 million renovation by Lubetz Architects enables a range of community uses. A 30-foot glass cube at the entrance tells visitors they're in for much more than book browsing.

SQUIRREL HILL

comic book “Manga.” Her attraction to the library’s appealing environment inspired her to volunteer, and, since January, the eighth-grader has spent several hours each week helping to shelve books and pick up toys in the children’s department.

But even branches that have yet to be updated report higher circulations, a trend that Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh Director Barbara K. Mistick attributes to a growing awareness of the Carnegie Library’s many offerings.

Libraries are vital to the many people who still do not own personal computers, says Holly McCullough, manager of the Squirrel Hill branch. And it’s getting harder and harder to get along without Internet access in today’s world.

“If you want to apply for a job at the University of Pittsburgh, you have to do it online, and if you want an appointment to apply for U.S. citizenship, you have to do it online,” Clark adds. “It’s happening more and more, and they’re all telling people that if they don’t have a computer, then they should go to their local library.”

According to Carnegie Library records, the system last year provided more than 385,000 hours of free computer access through its branches. Efforts to keep the Internet a safe place for its young users got a boost from the Verizon Foundation,

which donated \$25,000 to fund child safety programs in the library system.

As a whole, the Carnegie Library plays an important but often overlooked role in the region.

More than 6,100 people use the library system every day—about 2.2 million people a year. Carnegie Mellon University’s Center for Economic Development ranked the library system higher in attendance numbers than the Pittsburgh Zoo, any of the city’s museums, the Steelers, the Pirates and the Penguins during the course of the year. More than two-thirds of city residents between the ages of 13 and 36 have a library card.

The popularity of the library system was cited in a 2004 University of Wisconsin study as one of the primary factors for Pittsburgh’s ranking as the third most literate U.S. city, and the fourth highest for its library resources. And library usage is one of the measures employed by the Places Rated Almanac, which in April ranked Pittsburgh as America’s “Most Livable City” for the second time.

Surveys like those offer a reminder of the importance of public libraries in the city’s educational programs. More than 9,000 young people participate in

Carnegie Library’s summer reading programs, which have been shown to beat out summer school as the best way to produce vocabulary gains and give students an advantage over their fellow students who don’t read over the summer.

“We know quantitatively that early literacy makes a big difference in terms of later success,” says Mistick. “The schools are only open 180 days per year. The libraries do serve a critical need when it comes to education.”

That educational component is one of the big reasons the Endowments joined other charitable organizations such as the Buhl Foundation, the FISA Foundation and the Claude Worthington Benedum Foundation in supporting the Carnegie Library system over the years.

The Endowments’ recent grant helps fund capital projects in three city neighborhoods. New libraries will be built in the Hill District and the North Side, and the East Liberty branch will undergo major renovations in the next few years. The new Hill District branch will be across the street from one of the Pittsburgh School District’s accelerated learning academies, while the North Side library will be within walking distance of another. The East Liberty branch is a bus ride away from two of the schools.

Working with a renovation budget of about \$3 million, architects Loysen + Kreuthmeier created a space in the Carnegie Library's Brookline branch that has attracted teenagers back to the stacks, a group that the staff feared was lost for good. Stephanie Cato, 13, far right, and her sister, Madison, 11, both home-schooled in the Knoxville neighborhood of the city, work as volunteers and help plan programs for teens and children.



BROOKLINE

Joe Dominic, director of the Endowments Education Program, says that in addition to strengthening connections with nearby learning academies, he wouldn't mind if the foundation's library grant serves as a wake-up call to the larger community that the Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh not only is worth supporting, but also is in need of support.

Contrary to what many library users might believe, the Carnegie libraries are not well funded by Andrew Carnegie's financial legacy. The steel magnate did launch a library building program in 1895 that would make Donald Trump envious—he paid for construction of more than 2,500 libraries in the English-speaking world—but he left only a small amount of money for day-to-day operations. In fact, library officials say that the cash Carnegie set aside to actually run the libraries would keep the doors open for about six days per year.

Carnegie's stated vision was that he would pay for the buildings and the first shipments of books, but that the communities enjoying the libraries' benefits would have to pull together to manage—and pay for—the neighborhood institutions that bore his name.

Today, Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh officials report annual expenses of \$26.2 million. The library receives \$16 million per year—more than any other single recipient—from the Allegheny Regional Asset District, which allocates sales tax revenue funding to area cultural and civic programs in the county. Other contributors include: foundations, trusts, corporations and individuals, \$6.5 million; the state of Pennsylvania, \$6 million; and other government sources, about \$482,550. Included in that last category is \$49,208 from the City of Pittsburgh, which is about the same amount that city officials pledged to Andrew Carnegie as their annual contribution back in 1895.

And the local support the Pittsburgh library system receives—which is about 62 percent with the sales tax revenue included—lags far behind the national average of 81 percent. In fact, Pennsylvania ranks 43rd in local government support to library systems, though it is fifth in the amount of state funding given to libraries.

“This places unfair pressure on Pittsburgh foundations and other private funders to fill in the gaps, especially since so many other cities our size provide more public money for their library

systems,” says Endowments President Maxwell King.

In summing up the value of the library system's importance to local communities—especially when adapting to new social and economic issues—Carnegie Mellon researchers wrote:

“In all of the puzzling about how we reach the next generation, we never realized that Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh had already reached them... There are many challenges that our region will face in the coming decades. While the library will not be immune to these challenges, it may hold the key to overcoming them.”

Homewood branch manager Graham understands libraries' important role. She knew she wanted to make a difference in the world, and switched at the last minute from law school to library school on the advice of a mentor.

“I wanted to defend the down-trodden,” she recalls. “Now I love it when kids show me their report cards, or when parents come in with their kids. I know those are the things that really make a difference.” *h*



IN DOLLARS AND CENTS

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ehind the counter at the Party Cake Shop on Brookline Boulevard, owner George Dolan sees a slow but steady stream of customers carrying a book or two, stopping into his bakery after a visit to the Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh branch next door.

"It's moms and their kids coming in for a cookie, or maybe someone comes in for a cake, and I know they're from the library," says Dolan, shown at right with his brother Jack, displaying their signature burnt-almond torte. "Obviously anything like that is an asset to the community. I'm glad they're here."

The Party Cake Shop, which employs 17 people, is just one of hundreds of city businesses located near Carnegie Library branches. Many of those businesses benefit in one way or another from the presence of a library in their community.

A study by Carnegie Mellon University's Center for Economic Development found that every Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh patron spends an average of \$9.54 per visit at local shops and businesses.

"I talk to a lot of the business owners around here, and they're always saying to me how important the library is to them," says Holly McCullough, manager of the Squirrel Hill branch. "How could 400,000 people who come through my doors not have a positive impact on the local businesses?"

Pennsylvania Gov. Ed Rendell, in announcing the state's \$7.5 million contribution to the Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh's ongoing capital campaign, expressed his belief that libraries play a vital role in a community's economic well-being.

"They serve not only as a source of knowledge and information," he said, "but they are also economic drivers because they support local businesses and draw visitors to the area."

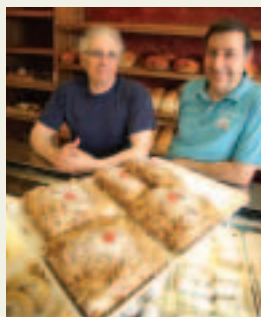
The renovated Carnegie libraries "will create vibrant, accessible, contemporary institutions that will play an important role in future community revitalization and learning for residents," Rendell said.

According to the Carnegie Mellon study, the Carnegie Library system generated an annual economic impact of \$63 million in the community, including direct spending and the ripple effect of money spent by the library branches and their customers.

"Libraries partner in community revitalization projects that depend on the library to provide support and advocacy for the neighborhood," the Carnegie Mellon researchers wrote. "The influence of an experienced library staff, the civic presence in the core of a community, and active and engaged community outreach all contribute to a stable neighborhood."

Some other highlights of the study include:

- Every dollar invested in the Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh returns about \$6 of value to local taxpayers.
- Every Allegheny County resident receives an average of \$75 in benefits from the Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh each year.
- The Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh supports more than 700 local jobs, either directly or indirectly. Another 200 jobs are created by library construction projects.
- If library patrons purchased the books they borrow from the library, they would pay about \$27 million.
- The Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh provides free access to several online databases that would cost as much as \$12 million if purchased by individual users.
- If library patrons paid to rent the DVDs and videos they borrow from the Carnegie libraries in the city, they would spend about \$2 million.



Rene Rosensteel