



The Seattle Public Library

**CANADIAN LIBRARY ASSOCIATION
JUNE 2005**

**BUILDING COMMUNITY SUPPORT FOR A NEW LIBRARY – THE
SEATTLE EXPERIENCE**

- Thank you.
- So pleased to be in Calgary. The only trouble in being here is can't show you the new central library.
- While it's not exactly as exhilarating as being there, before I get started talking to you about my favorite topic and way of life – BUILDING COMMUNITY SUPPORT FOR LIBRARIES – like to show you a short seven minute DVD about the central library

Show DVD

- It has been an incredible year since we opened May 23, 2004 to an excited crowd of 28,000 people.
- Since opening day more than 2 million people have visited our library – breaks down to 5,000 – 8,000 people/day except vacations;
- Spring vacation, Thanksgiving holiday, week between Christmas and New Year – 12,000 – 18,000/day. Summer proving from first days lollapalooza!
- Become major tourist attraction – speak more later about economic impact study done – BUT – we know about 34% daily basis out-of-towners; 50% on weekends; 60% + during holidays

- As said, tourism extremely important and I'll talk more – but stunning is use by our public – more than 50,000 new library cards, circ up 60% - and not just central, but everywhere in system.
- The building has fascinated, excited and attracted not only local library users, but architects, media and people from all over the world. So we have tourists, we have Seattleites and – as you can guess from the numbers – **we have one busy library!**
- So today I will talk about how we got from here to there.
- Or from a library system frequently called a de facto center for the homeless, to one that is internationally renowned and well used by locals – not to mention a major tourist attraction.
- While there is a lot of excitement around our library system now as we continue to rebuild and renew, 11 years ago, the horizon was bleak.
- I was hired in late 1997 to be the new city librarian, but also to develop a capital construction bond measure after the failure of one bond proposal in 1994.
- There were a lot of reasons why the first bond failed – disconnected staff, difficulties between public officials and the library board, weak economy, lack of support from influential leaders and organizations, an inability to articulate clearly the vision, no background preparation on costs to run the new library, and a tax-weary public.
- Two months ago we held an international conference on The Seattle Public Library for 300 librarians and public officials titled, “Shattering Stereotypes.”
- In every session, we reflected on our vision for and implementation of Libraries for All.
- We talked about what we had done well and lessons learned.

- Bottom line, however, is that none of our successes would have happened without our heavy commitment to, and engagement of our stakeholders, staff and the patrons of The Seattle Public Library.

How did we achieve successful engagement?

- Immediate task: Building collaborative relationships between myself and policy makers. Between administration and staff. Between Library Board and Friends of the Library. Basically, every relationship was broken and trust was almost non-existent.
- Bringing policy makers together and repairing relationships – historic library board, city council, mayor work session – all concerns out on table – gave staff framework for issues and work plan for answering them
- Talking to the public – 100 public meetings - what did they want from their library system? What beyond capital to meet their needs?
- Meeting with staff – as individuals, as teams, as work units
- Developing relationships with staff
- Developing relationship with union
- In each of these – honesty – people felt tricked and manipulated before
- Doing due diligence on all fiscal background and information. Not just on bond, but what it would cost to operate new and improved buildings.
- Through listening to the public and staff, was able to convince the mayor and City Council - regardless of whether the bond passed – to increase our budget by 15 percent for more books and open hours
- Foundation commitment to raise \$40 million: \$25 million to complete the Libraries for All program (told public if it contributed, we would balance out costs with private funding) and \$15 million for endowments again whether or not bond passed (we knew that with larger facilities that would draw more patrons, we would need additional funds for programs, collections and outreach).

- Site selection Central
- Convinced mayor library should run its own capital program and not another city department
- \$196.4 million self-taxing bond measure presented March 13, 1998 - 4 months after I started.
- Taxation in US – property taxes
- Complemented this public money with other sources of revenue as well as private money to build more than \$280 million of new library facilities.
- We call this measure “Libraries for All.”
- In addition to Central – 26 branches libraries – 4 in neighborhood never had a library, eight brand new replacement facilities, nine libraries doubled in size, five renovations of Carnegies.
- Standing ovation when central site selected – like so much – people weren’t listened to – “no place like home.”
- Public hearings, Matthew Fox story. Again trust. Listening. Honesty.
- Campaign begins in earnest.
- Throughout this process, important to keep stakeholders engaged, including activists who were down on government, downtown and large public projects.
- Recently read something written about that election: it said – “one year after arriving, ½ of Seattle felt they were personally related to Jacobs”
- Election night in November, 70 percent voters said “Yes” to Libraries for All.
- That was just the beginning.

Vision

- Before I get into implementation, tell you a bit about where we are –
- Opened 16 libraries in neighborhoods and use skyrocketing – some libraries seen circ increase of 300 – 450%! Others a more humble 10 – 20%.
- The Library Foundation raised more than \$83 million – coming from 22,000 households – not just for construction, but to ensure more technology and create endowments for services to children and youth, humanities programs and books.
- You can see, in Seattle, we believe in our libraries and invest in them.
- When asked to describe my vision, I like to say that my vision is to engage people so regularly and so thoroughly that the vision of the users and the staff guides us. We regularly work with each group to hear their “hopes and dreams” for their library. And, as I said in the DVD, my joy is having the opportunity to implement those hopes and dreams!
- In a nutshell – my passionate belief – the surest road to success is through substantively and honestly engaging people in our process.
- If you’re going to “pretend” to listen – DON’T do it – people know
- And if you’re going to do it, be prepared to listen well, understand what is behind the words – and then move forward with bold decision making, good communication about the decision and timeliness of decisions.
- Many people afraid to do this – but for me and for my library systems... it works!

Implementation

- Back to implementation

- Next day neighborhood groups were calling wanting us to meet with them.
- \$20 million gift; Patty Stonecipher (Gates Foundation director), Foundation increased goal.
- Developed staff for Libraries for All and hit the ground running; hired staff who would implement my vision of being publicly visible, engaging public and staff and be willing to be accountable
- Knew in implementation, we would need to continue doing what we had already done so well – involve stakeholders, staff and the public.
- Processes put in place to ensure we could do that.
- Our commitment was to do this successfully, to involve people, but not to dumb down decisions and to have the end result be bold, decisive and timely.
- Work hard to stay visible in communities, updating residents at community meeting, producing communication pieces, heavy use of our web, asking for input AND responding to all communication
- Goals to “over communicate,” – partially driven out of fear – public distrustful of government and how government spends tax dollars – wanted to be transparent in all our decisions
- Example of a branch project. Site selection, architect selection, Hopes & Dreams, schematic, design development, opening day

Central

- As we’ve gone through this process many times we’ve learned how to refine what we do, manage expectations AND be willing to make adjustments and be flexible.
- So how did we get Rem? Didn’t set out to hire a “hot shot” architect, but rather one who would be willing to participate in an extensive public and staff process, be attentive to our exacting building program requirements

AND work with a strong and demanding owner/client who knew exactly what they wanted.

- Everyone had advice for us in the design community, including mayor and city council. Had to choose what to respectfully listen to and disagree with us. Need to trust own instincts
- Best advice, and advice I took and am most commonly recognized for in major news and design media, including receiving national and local awards and recognition from major architectural, design and engineering organizations, BE A GOOD CLIENT.
- If I were to summarize what being a good client means – remember what everyone’s job is – I am a librarian, committed to function and integrity of my building program, they are the architects or contractors – they know how to design – my job is to tell them what I don’t like, not to design it.
- My job is also to NOT be snowed over by their supposed authority. I am the one with the moral authority and responsibility – I hold the final trump card!
- No design competition – wanted to involve staff and public
- Three things looking for –
 1. How does one design a building that can gracefully and functionally house more than a million books and materials that grow at unmeasurable rates?
 2. How does one plan for the unknown future of technology?
 3. How do we plan for the changing roles/mission, beyond books and technology, that the library will be expected to become? In other words p how do you plan for this in a way that protects the public spaces, while ensuring a welcoming community gathering place without becoming a “dumb box?”
- Just to give you an idea of the intensity – concurrently choosing sites for branches, architects for branches, raising private funds, selling bonds, found 100,000 square foot space to move to for temporary library,

weeded collections, designed new systems, ran the library, economy decline and cutting budget ... you get the picture!

Involving public and staff, especially union

- Early on – welcomed union into process - from the ASAP that helped recommend central architect to touring west coast libraries with Rem, the library board, other design team members and me – union involved.
- Purpose of trip – to learn from their experiences, to see what we liked, to develop personal relationships, develop common vocabulary – allowed for easier sharing of vision and communication during later years – especially during times of tension.
- Remember – with central – it was a six year relationship... imagine a child from birth to six... those were six long years. And sometimes scary years.
- Union invited management, some of our consultants and our architects to meeting they sponsored with union leaders from four other libraries which had recently built central libraries – to learn from their experiences what worked for them, how or if they were involved and what would have made it work more smoothly.
- We learned SO much from this. Many of our decisions of how to continue engaging staff/union were based on these lessons learned.
- Example – designing work rooms, trying out furniture –
- Spent enough time in new facilities – two weeks branches, three weeks central – before they open to give staff a chance to get use to new buildings and systems – especially since we were implementing self-check, automatic handling of materials, new methods of providing reference services, etc before opening
- most importantly – giving staff an opportunity to celebrate before donors/public officials/public
- Central alone – 37 staff work groups worked with the design team to ensure all aspects of design were functional and efficient for modern service delivery.

- Pleased to tell you, by and large, we love working in the building because of this effort... it is not only beautiful from the inside, but it is totally functional. It is functional because our staff worked hand in hand with the architects to bring to life our detailed building programs.
- Branch staff/union teams smaller, of course, but important
- Trained union members on how to be most effective in design process
- At central – had 11 different public work groups – giving feedback and recommendations on everything from using the library as a researcher, a homeless person, a person with disabilities, a parent, etc.
- We showed rough schematic design to public early on. Not just Central Library design, but branch design as well. This was risky, because it was before designs were fully developed, but that was best time for input... public worried that we were giving them things “not perfect.”
- We also kept Mayor and City Council informed of all phases of our projects so there would be no surprises, ESPECIALLY when ran into problems
- Did same thing with press
- Provided special opportunities for all of them, as well as staff, to tour buildings under construction, as well as, with Rem – to meet Rem personally – have drinks with him, listen to him. Important consideration – treat staff, public officials, press like you would donors!
- Difficulty of opening new buildings while our operating budget was being reduced.
- The genius of the fiscal note.
- Maintained core values when we cut our budget.
- Did not cut infrastructure.

- Gave us a leg up as we began building.

The building

- Today – focus less on the building, but more on specific features
- You can take a virtual photo tour of the building as well as get a lot more specific information off our website: www.spl.org
- Also – people who went to the Shattering Stereotypes conference were given a “virtual tour” narrated by me of all the building features.
- In quick summary – 362,000 square feet and underground parking garage. 11 building floors. Two main entries due to our site, able to see books from outside!
- State this because – this building might look somewhat wacko – but it is all about THE BOOK. Not only do we have the revolutionary book spiral, which houses 80% of our books on open book stacks and is so welcoming and well lit that I believe THAT is one of the reasons for our increase in circ; but has 17 miles of books and materials on 30 miles of shelves... and this is just on the spiral... we have books on every public service floor.
- Part of what makes the building unique for us is our approach to technology
- Incorporated efficient new technology.
- People thought Seattle should have whiz bang technology in the new library.
- We did too and we told Rem to come back to us with some creative ideas.
- Worked with some of the best minds in the world.
- But here is an example: lights following librarians with subject specialties.

- While that might have seemed funny, it did lead our IT director to coming up with the GPS devices (wireless necklaces) original designed for hospital use.
- They do not project light, but voice and finds subject specialists when needed quickly.
- Not whiz-bang, it is something already in use that we modified for ourselves.
- New technology allows librarians to wear devices around neck that allows them to walk around building and communicate with one another
- More we thought about whiz bang, the more we realized our buildings needed to have enough - enough technology.
- Like you, we worry about those with disparity, those without computers or Internet connection.
- Central library has 400 computers; furniture with outlets for patrons to plug in their laptops and wi fi access.
- We took a huge financial risk when we decided to invest in automatic materials handling and sorting system. System we use is TechLogic.
- Books come in and are automatically checked in and sorted using RFID technology. 1,400 an hour, with commitments to increase that number from the company
- Work that use to take branch staff – unpacking Monday deliveries, for instance – use to take them two days, now takes ½ hour.
- Self-check at every location.
- This and so much more, is allowing us not to just handle increases at the Central Library, but huge increases at every branch we open.

Economic impact

- Over years, librarians have tried to show eco impact ... but no hard figures – rather extrapolations – as in, “if public bought all books checked out or paid x dollars for reference questions.... It would cost 10 x more than cost of libraries – great value!!”
- Unfortunately – this made us feel good – but didn’t seem to impress public officials a whit
- I began to realize something was “UP” with SPL before we opened as critics began arriving from national and international press for tours.
- One week before opening the articles began appearing and they were all rave reviews.
- New York Times critic, in Sunday paper said – “At a dark hours, Seattle’s new central library is a blazing chandelier to swing your dreams upon. If an American city can erect a civic project as brave as this one, the sun hasn’t set on the West. In more than 30 years of writing about architecture, this is the most exciting new building it has been my honor to review. I could go on piling up superlatives like cars in a multiple collision, but take my word: there’s going to be a whole lot of rubbernecking going on.”
- At that point, I began talking with public officials and business leaders about how to go about getting an “economic impact study” done.
- Recommended the best – and I hired her and her firm.
- Told her – keep it conservative, don’t feel you have to find something... but if there is something there, I want to know it, market it and milk it for all it’s worth.
- Well – bottom line – there is. Study showed, in summary:
 1. Developers are making decisions about building housing and other amenities within a mile radius of library BASED on presence of central library

2. In first year of being open - \$16 million of new money has come into Seattle from visitors who say the library is the primary reason they have come to Seattle.
 3. With proper open hours and marketing – this can continue for years to come – like the Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao.
- The study is in its final edit – but drafts can be found on firm’s website: www.berkandassociates.com . When it is final it will also be available on our website.
 - My plan is to work with the Mayor and downtown businesses and developers to show them that it is to THEIR economic advantage to market us – the library doesn’t benefit from this – but they do.
 - Of course, what I want is – increased open hours, assistance in staffing our tour coordinator position, payment of printing costs for maps and brochures, etc.
 - My communications director and I have had to learn a whole new set of skill sets – like negotiating with Volkswagen or fashion magazines or Paramount Pictures for the filming of a new Tom Cruise movie – and I can tell you – I never learned this in library school!

The future

- As we face the future, we look forward to adapting to our times – but always - holding onto our past as we strive to the future.
- Internally, we are working on some key initiatives, including improving service to our immigrant and refugee communities, developing stronger Seattle history collections and services and building even stronger endowments for books and services to special communities and children
- We also want to start a technology endowment so we can protect whiz-bang technology in whatever format it takes in the future.

- As the economy improves, we are also looking to restore budget dollars lost during the bad times.
- Also – making sure, as an advocate, that the library is represented at all key tables including early childhood education, downtown strategies, neighborhood police forums... you name it, we want to and expect to be indispensable to our community on all fronts.

Conclusion

- I won't pretend any of this has been easy. But goodness gracious... it has been well worth it.
- To be a library – a library as recognized as the finest building of any type in the world (GQ said in a recent issue that the Seattle Central Library is one of ten buildings of all time that every “hot” man should know about), to be seen as THE place to go to for information in our city, to be known as an economic stimulator for Seattle AND to be recognized as providing creative leadership – well this is something that makes us all quite proud.
- In the May 16th editorial of ENGINEERING NEWS RECORD, they said – “The recipe for Ground Zero projects is in Seattle Library.... The Seattle library should be a model for public officials and private owners everywhere who want to turn limited budget dollars into projects that are special and not merely functional....The Ground Zero projects will not be a legacy to any individual, but the 2,749 people who died there. If it takes a little longer to capture Seattle's kind of magic, then that time will be well spent.”
- We all have a lot of challenges ahead.
- I believe those working in libraries are the smartest people in world. Look forward to watching and working with you and all our colleagues around the world.