

ROLAND PARK LIBRARY TO OPEN

**\$5.3 million job
doubles size of
branch; project
took 18 months**

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BY BRENT JONES
(SUN REPORTER)

Those who look at the construction in the 5100 block of Roland Ave. often stop, stare and ask the same question of the building's workers.

When is the library going to reopen?

"The curiosity level has been very high," said Carla D. Hayden, executive director of the Enoch Pratt Free Library system. It's like a Christmas present being unfolded."

At noon today, the Roland Park Branch will reopen after an 18-month, \$5.3 million renovation, marking an end to a major overhaul of the library system for this year.

Two new libraries were opened in East and Southeast Baltimore. Library officials had dubbed 2007 "The Year of The Pratt" and said they hope that the new libraries and the renovation at Roland Park will invigorate the surrounding neighborhoods.

Roland Park's 9,500 square feet more than doubles the space before renovation. The building will house 215,000 items, including books, magazines, newspapers and DVDs. It will offer 12 computers for public use, a community

room, a quiet study room and wireless Internet access.

Before this year, the Baltimore library system hadn't opened a new branch in 35 years. Six years ago, the system closed five branches, and two others were shut down in the late 1990s.

The revitalization has come about, in part, because of a nearly 50 percent budget increase since 2001, as city revenues spiked and produced surpluses. Private donations are also on the rise.

Library officials said the Roland Park community raised about \$2 million to help pay for the renovation. The city paid the balance.

"The community has really taken ownership of this library," Hayden said.

Late last week, employees were putting books on shelves, stacking DVDs and arranging furniture. Library officials say they expect increased traffic after the reopening, with visitors more likely to stay longer and feel less cramped because of the additional space.

Inside, a teen area, study room, computer lab and adult literature section take up the second floor. Light shines through five 10-foot-tall windows, and the new ceiling rises about 30 feet.

The lower level features the children's area and checkout.

"It's just a beautiful building," said Patricia Costello, chief of neighborhood services for the library system.

In August, the Orleans Street Branch opened across the street from Paul Laurence Dunbar High and near Sojourner-Douglass College. The new library was funded entirely by Johns

Hopkins Medicine as part of a project that began five years ago.

Southeast Anchor Library, a 27,000-square-foot facility, opened in May in Highlandtown. The library, in the 3600 block of Eastern Ave., houses an 80,000-volume collection, offers Internet access on nearly 60 computers with flat-screen monitors, and sells coffee and pastries in its first-floor café.

Library officials say that next year, they'll focus on promoting the new building. Renovations are also scheduled to begin at The Edmondson Avenue and Reisterstown Road branches.

By summer, officials say, they expect to complete an overhaul of the Northwood branch.

"In 2008, it's time to tell people about it," Hayden said. "The sequel will be getting the word out. We've been called the best kept secret in town. And we don't want to be."