



## Ramona's new library—not so hush-hush

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Almost everyone who was anybody to do with the county library system, the Ramona Library, the Friends of the Ramona Library or the design, building and maintaining of the new library planned for Ramona was in the Community Center on May 7.

They were joined by citizens interested in the new library, which will be the largest in the county's library system. Groundbreaking is scheduled for this fall, with the opening planned for January 2011 or sooner.

After a brief welcome from Friends of Ramona Library President Elyse Kuhn, José Aponte, Director of the San Diego County Library system, kicked off the introductions of the key players in the creation of the new library. Aponte, who is the son of a librarian and has a passion for libraries, said that he expects the stories that will come out of the library will likely rival those that are housed within it. He demonstrated his point by relating examples of the life-changing services that libraries afford the public, such as teaching adults how to read so they can then get a driver's license, and providing a place for families to come together.

Using expansive words like foundational, transformational and intergenerational, Aponte spoke of the positive influence the new library will provide the community of Ramona. Not just a place to circulate books, libraries now are places for students to study and for adults to take classes ranging from parenting to knitting. They offer Wii gaming to teens, crafts to children and computer instruction to everyone, and the list goes on.

The Ramona Library project is testimony to fiscal prudence on behalf of the county library system, those at the get-together agreed. When other jurisdictions are cutting service hours and delaying capital projects, the Ramona Library is forging ahead. County libraries have increased hours by more than 6 percent and doubled Sunday hours.

Tom Fincher, chief of Project Management and Facilities Management for the county, said that the Ramona and Fallbrook libraries are the first in the county to be constructed using the design-build concept. The previous method of selecting an architectural and engineering firm to do their job under one contract, and then having a separate contract for the building phase has proven to be less cost-effective and efficient than the design-build concept, said Fincher, a Ramona resident.

The team focus and commitment in design-build are much like a marriage, requiring a relationship in which communication is open and issues are worked through, Fincher said, reducing the possibility of unforeseen problems and cost overruns.

Four teams presented proposals under the Request for Proposal (RFP) from the county.

"The response from the community to the concept presented by C.W. Driver was overwhelmingly positive," said Fincher.

Representatives from each part of the design-build team were at the meeting to answer questions. Joe Grosshart, vice president, and Andy Feth, senior project manager, were there from C.W. Driver, the project's general contractor.

Grosshart is no stranger to Ramona. He was on the team that built the Kmart shopping center.

"We are an old firm, building excellence in Southern California for 90 years," he said.

Phil Pape and Emily Schauermaier represented Ferguson Pape Baldwin Architects, and Manuel Oncina, the architect who will be doing the interior, was there. Oncina did the well-received new library in Encinitas. He explained the challenges that the evolution of libraries presents.

Comedian Billy Crystal said upon the retirement of Carlsbad City Librarian Cliff Lange, "Now you can talk as loud as you want to." Oncino explained that libraries are evolving from those hush-hush places many recall from their youth.

The space must now address the multigenerational, multifunctional uses where families come together for many reasons. Oncino's challenge as the designer of the interior space is to blend all the functions that the community will be expecting of the building into a harmonious space where the quiet readers will not be hindered by the teen games and children's story hour.

His concepts include a passive, restful “living room” with a fireplace and comfortable sofas and armchairs. There will be a stagecoach to spur imagination and playfulness in the children’s area.

Even though the whole library is primarily a large open space, the use of sound absorption materials, “moveable containment apparatus” (aka walls), and different ceiling heights will serve to reduce noise in each area.

Ramona resident Myra Davis expressed concerns over the adequacy of handicapped parking, since the current library parking is such a problem. She asked about access to the library and the possibility that there might be drive-up book drops, especially helpful to handicapped drivers. Pape said that handicapped access was important and more easily attained since the Main Street site at 13th Street is so flat. There will be no entry steps, because access will be at grade, and there will be automatic doors and wide openings. They are considering more than the minimum required handicapped parking stalls.

Additionally, a great part of the book collection will be displayed in what was referred to as the “Marketplace” concept. That is, while there will still be the traditional stacks of books, the most popular, well-used part of the collection will be on low display shelves for easy identification and access.

Since the entire library will be run by only three staff members—in circulation, reference and the children’s department—it will not be possible to have a drive-up book drop area, which would require another staff person to attend it on a regular basis.

The building exterior is designed to be pedestrian oriented from both Main Street bus stops and the parking lot, so there will be no automobile access right next to the building.

Karen Smith, Ramona resident and frequent visitor to the Julian Library, asked if there would be opportunities for local artists to participate in the enhancement of the building.

She used the artwork of James Hubbell at the Julian Library as an example. It was suggested that the Friends of Ramona Library be the liaison for the artist community, since there will also be gallery space in the new building.

Kuhn, wrapped up the morning’s presentation, cautioned residents that if they want to use the new library’s community room, they should book immediately. The 5,000-square-foot community room can be divided into three smaller spaces, and it can also open up to the Poet’s Patio.

The space is already drawing the attention of prospective brides for weddings and community groups for fundraisers.