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# Building the Beginnings of a Beautiful Partnership

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## ABSTRACT

The authors describe the process leading to, and the outcome of, their partnership to build and operate a 76,000 square foot public/community college joint use library. Located in Westminster, Colorado, the College Hill Library serves a population of approximately 70,000 Westminster residents and 6,000 Front Range Community College faculty and staff. The partnership began in 1994 to investigate the feasibility of building the facility, which opened in April 1998 and continues to be successful today. The authors provide information on the main points of the Intergovernmental Agreement to build and operate the facility and relate their experiences during the planning, construction, and initial year of operation of the library. They discuss issues relating to combining staff, automation systems, and collections as well as special challenges in publicizing the library to the community. An update on the current state of the partnership is provided by the current co-directors of the library.

## INTRODUCTION

On April 7, 1998, the College Hill Library opened its doors to the public for the first time. This one library facility would serve as the central library for two agencies: the City of Westminster, Colorado, a suburban city of 100,000 located ten miles from Denver, Colorado; and the Westminster campus of Front Range Community College (FRCC), the largest campus of the largest community college in Colorado. Front Range Community College is one of several community colleges making up the Colorado Community College System. The Colorado Community College System serves

more than 117,000 students statewide. Front Range Community College serves more than 23,000 students. The community colleges were established to provide two-year programs and degrees for students.<sup>1</sup>

Hopes were high, on Grand Opening day, that the new building would meet the needs of both communities in a way that two, smaller separate buildings would not have been able to do. Several years of working together had established the beginnings of a partnership between the two libraries that would come together in this building, a partnership that could lead to further expansion of library services for students and public library users alike. But the project also had its risks.

Few joint academic/public libraries existed anywhere in the country at the time, and some that had been attempted were later abandoned. The two agencies had many obstacles to overcome, such as different missions, fiscal calendars, sources of funding, policies, personnel rules, and computer systems. So why did the City of Westminster and Front Range Community College undertake such a venture? And, seven years on, has this partnership been a success? We will try to answer these questions from the point of view of the library's customers and staff, and the larger community, as well as from our (Kathy Sullivan and Warren Taylor) own as its administrators for its first six years of operation, with an added update on the last nine months from the two current co-directors of the library, Mary Grace Barrick and Roger Stelk.

When our two parent organizations asked us, as library directors, to evaluate the feasibility of building a joint library, we were intrigued, excited, and a more than a little nervous. Both the college and the city were in desperate need of more library space. The city was then operating two small (approximately 5,000 square feet each) buildings to serve a community that was approaching 100,000 people, with no facility located in the area where most of the population now resided. City officials and library staff had spent several years developing plans to build a new library within a mile of the community college campus, near the geographic center of Westminster. The college had a facilities master plan indicating the need for 45,000 square feet and had already started planning to build a new facility within its main campus building. The funds needed to build a new college library would be provided from the State of Colorado general fund, based on this approved facilities master plan. Funding was limited for both agencies, and neither had the wherewithal to build a library that would serve as the focal point of information and reading for its community.

The idea of a possible joint facility originated with Dr. Tom Gonzales, then FRCC president, and Bill Christopher, then Westminster city manager. The city and college had enjoyed a long relationship of cooperation on mutually beneficial enterprises, for example, building a Performing Arts Center and developing courses in golf course management in conjunction with the city golf courses. FRCC administrators knew of an existing joint

use library in Broward County, Florida, that seemed to be working well.<sup>2</sup> Library staff were asked to evaluate the idea to see whether it could work in Westminster. The staff knew we were being asked not only to cooperate in the building of a new library but also in a brand new partnership that would interconnect our operations, policies, and services for years to come.

It was exciting to envision a partnership that, by combining our resources, could result in one library building that would provide the full range of public and community college library services for all. But could such a library actually work in reality? How dependent or independent would the two libraries be? Would there be constant conflicts between user groups (for example, college students and preschoolers)? Would the two libraries merge to become one, or function more as next-door neighbors? Could we peacefully coexist, offering complementary services and collections that would enhance each library's own? Or would the new partnership result in never-ending headaches for the managers and animosity between the two staffs? What about parking, and the fact that the college and city are on different fiscal calendars? Should the two collections be integrated or separate? Should the collections use Library of Congress (LC) classification or the Dewey Decimal System, or both? And what kind of computer system would be needed in such a facility?

### THE PARTNERSHIP BEGINS

The first step taken to attempt to answer these and other questions was a visit to Broward County, Florida. Broward County and Broward Community College were already operating two joint facilities at the time—the South Regional facility, built ten years before our visit, and the North Regional Facility in Coconut Creek, which had just opened when we visited in the spring of 1995. Front Range Community College and City of Westminster Library staff and administrators, Westminster City Councillors, and the chair of the Westminster Library Board all made the trip to see how well this joint library worked.

All were impressed by how well the community college and public library resources had been combined at the North Regional facility—resulting in a building that was attractive, inviting, and functional for both user groups. The staffs at both the South Regional and North Regional libraries generously shared their Intergovernmental Agreement with us and were candid about the pros and cons of their arrangements. Our delegation returned from this trip much more excited about the potential of a combined library and less nervous about the possible pitfalls. After the Broward visit, several other models were also reviewed, providing a good framework from which to develop a workable model for Front Range Community College and the City of Westminster.

The remainder of that spring and summer was spent in serious negotiation about how the new library would be owned, operated, paid for, and

managed. Careful negotiation was required to resolve more contentious issues such as the ownership, location, and name of the building and the catalog system to be used. Some of the major negotiation points included the following:

- The building would be located on the college campus but would be separate from the main campus building. It would be located to provide easy access from the west parking lot (the one least used by college students), highly visible and identifiable from the main road, and with covered access from the main campus building.
- All public space in the library would be open to use by all.
- The building would be owned by the State of Colorado. The Intergovernmental Agreement granting the city its share of the building would be in effect for fifty years, with a renewal clause if both parties should wish to continue the arrangement beyond that time.
- The college would pay for 60 percent of the cost of building the 76,000 square foot facility and use 60 percent of the building space for its services. The city would pay the remaining 40 percent for its portion of the space.
- The city and college would share equally the cost of an additional parking lot to provide approximately 150 additional parking spaces.
- Each agency would purchase and own furnishings, equipment, and supplies.
- The college would provide building maintenance, utilities, telephone service, security, janitorial services, grounds maintenance, and snow removal and bill the City for 40 percent of the annual cost.
- Each party would budget for, purchase, and manage their own collections.
- The library would be operated with one computer network, to be agreed upon by the two library directors.
- Management of the two library operations would be determined by the two library directors, but with as little duplication of services and functions as possible.
- A plan to dissolve the arrangement was also included in the Intergovernmental Agreement.

### THE BUILDING GETS UNDERWAY

In August 1995 the Colorado State Board for Community Colleges and Occupational Education and the Westminster City Council approved an Intergovernmental Agreement to jointly build and operate the library. The college had already hired the architectural firm of Bennett, Wagner, and Grody to begin designing their new space. The city entered into a third-party agreement with the architects to add approximately 30,000 square feet for public library services in a building separated from the main campus build-

ing, and to integrate the building programs of the two entities to provide convenient access to services for both user groups.

After much debate about where to locate a single entrance to the building, the architects proposed a two-story building with two entrances. The lower-level entrance would face the main street in front of the campus, and be accessible from the west parking lot, which was least used by college students. The upper-level entrance would face the main campus building and connect to that building by an enclosed walkway. Given both the size of the building and the desire to provide easy access for both college students and the general public, both parties agreed that this was the best solution.

The architects also designed a long, gently curved wall on the northwest side of the building with large windows, providing a panoramic view of the Rocky Mountains from both levels. On the lower level, a public meeting room, circulation services, the children's library, new books area, audio and videotapes, a small newspaper and magazine browsing area, and large print books were all located close to the entrance. On the upper level, circulation/reserves, the reference desk and collection, the college's nonfiction collection, media services, and the library instruction room would be located close to the upper level entrance, most used by college faculty and students.

Meanwhile, city and college library staff task forces met to discuss whether to integrate the college's nonfiction collection (classified in LC) and the city's more general nonfiction collection (classified in Dewey Decimal). Because there was little subject overlap between the two collections, and considering the cost of a retrospective conversion, the two staffs decided to classify and shelve the nonfiction collections separately but to incorporate all items in one database. All the city's collections were housed on the lower level, with the exception of reference materials purchased by the city, which would be classified using LC and added to the shared reference collection on the second floor.

Other amenities located on the lower level included the Friends of the Library gift shop, five group study rooms accommodating six to ten people each, the Rocky Flats reading room (paid for and staffed by the U.S. Department of Energy), and the Technical Services departments of both libraries, operating side by side. On the upper level were placed administrative offices for both libraries, the Media Center, a large public meeting room, a conference room, five more group study rooms, a distance-learning classroom, and Instructional Services. The lower level was designed as the noisier, popular materials floor, while the upper level was reserved for quieter, more research-oriented use.

The architects met with staff from both libraries to address specific issues related to building design and function. Open access to the whole of the library by all users was the underlying principle that guided our decisions. Any library user could enter the building at either entrance, return and

check out their materials at either circulation desk, reserve a group study room on either floor, and use any of the library's computers (for example, most children preferred to use computers in the children's library, but they were also welcome in the reference area on the second floor). The two large meeting rooms (one on each level) were both open to use by college, city, or other community groups. To facilitate administration of these rooms, a room scheduling software module was purchased jointly by the two agencies, and room rental fees were divided equally.

### FUNDRAISING FOR ENHANCEMENTS

As plans for the facility took shape, it became more and more apparent that this exciting facility would be a major asset to the community. The facility would have ample space, state-of-the art equipment, beautiful interior finishes, and lovely views of the mountains. The college and city were also contributing funds for attractive, comfortable furniture, and 1 percent of the project budget was set aside for purchasing art for the building. However, there were still several "wish list" items beyond the budgets of either institution, so a joint fundraising committee was formed.

Westminster is not a particularly affluent community, with no established philanthropic tradition, and the community college had done some fundraising but was still finding its way in this area as well. A realistic goal of \$100,000 was raised, and a list of enhancements generated to get prospective donors excited. The college's development office headed the campaign, and it was agreed that funds would be held in a college account that had already been set up for gifts. The fundraising committee identified opportunities to name rooms for significant contributions (ranging from \$1,000 for a small group study room to \$50,000 for a large meeting room), and a donor wall was planned to acknowledge all contributions both large and small.

Through the combined efforts of college and city community members, \$120,000 was raised by the end of the construction project. These funds were used to provide a beautiful wooden castle-like structure in the middle of the children's library, to commission two large murals for the children's library (painted by local children's author Janet Stevens), and to purchase enhanced student and instructor workstations for the Computer Instruction Room. All individuals, businesses, and organizations were listed on the donor wall, creating a great sense of community pride and ownership in the new library and building excitement about its opening.

### AUTOMATION

A major challenge in planning the new library was the choice of an automated system that would serve the needs of both libraries. The two libraries contracted with DNR, a technology-consulting firm based in Chicago. The consultant examined various options, including migrating the

college's data (located on a CARL system) to the city's existing Dynix system (or vice versa), purchasing a new system to serve both entities, or each agency retaining their own separate system. The consultant sent out RFPs to Dynix, CARL, and several other major vendors to determine the costs of each option. As it turned out, the cost of upgrading and expanding the city's Dynix system to include Front Range's holdings was by far the least expensive option, and it met the requirements of both agencies as well as any of the vendors could, so that option was chosen. The city and college shared the cost of the upgrade/expansion and the cost of connecting the new library via a T-1 line to the server, located at the Westminster City Hall. The city later replaced this T-1 line with fiber optic cable, at no cost to the college.

The city library's automation staff, Veronica Smith and Eric Sisler, handled ongoing automation issues. The job descriptions for these two city positions included planning for and managing library automation for both the city and college libraries. In return, FRCC bore responsibility for providing a position to head reference services for both agencies and to provide most of the reference desk staffing. Over the years, the city's automation team worked with both staffs to make annual decisions about shared electronic resources, to write and update Internet policies, and to negotiate the purchase of new technologies such as self-checkout units, an electronic notification system (Dynix Telecirc), and an upgrade from the Dynix to the Horizon integrated library system.

### STAFF REACTIONS

Overcoming the concerns of the staff as the project began was something of a challenge for both institutions. Both staffs feared that the joint library would result in their jobs being eliminated. Barring that, they were still concerned that the service ethic, level of expertise, or work methods of the "other" group would be a problem. The old stereotypes about how college librarians and public librarians differ in their approaches to service had to be overcome. College library staff would be facing some new challenges, like learning to work with a new integrated library system (Dynix), dealing with collecting fines for overdue materials, and learning to work with many more children in the building. Similarly, public library staff would need to learn to answer more complicated reference questions, give formal classes in the Library Instruction room, and deal with the unique needs of college students.

As soon as the Intergovernmental Agreement was approved and planning began, staff from both agencies began meeting on a frequent basis on task forces formed to address various operational and policy issues. Both staffs also attended a one-day team building retreat where integrated groups of staff were broken into teams to complete various exercises.

As the two staffs interacted on a regular basis, it became apparent that

they had much more in common than they had previously imagined. The circulation task force found that only a few minor changes needed to be made in order to create consistent loan policies. The loan periods for most items were already quite similar, and the Dynix system was able to specify separate loan periods for unique collections such as College Reserves. The Reference Services task force found more similarities than differences in Internet policies, printer charges, etc. The Interlibrary Loan committee came up with a way to share the work of processing interlibrary loan requests that was easy to understand, efficient, and fair. Library staff were consulted at every step of the process to design and develop the library. By the time the library opened, both staffs had already learned how to work together and felt very comfortable with each other.

In the seven years since the library opened, issues and concerns between the two staff groups have occasionally come up, but not to any greater extent than would normally be expected between different working groups in any library. Staff also learned a great deal from one another and cooperated to better serve children, non-English speakers, and remote users. There were very few times when we, as co-directors, needed to spend time resolving issues among the staff. The biggest challenge for each agency was, and continues to be, identifying developments within each agency that might affect the other agency's staff and communicating those appropriately. As the operation of both libraries is affected by any decisions made, sensitivity is required and the personalities of the two directors can play an important role.

### BUILDING ACCESS

One of the most formidable challenges posed by the joint library project was how to make room for the additional vehicles visiting the public library. The parking situation on the college campus varied by the time of year and time of day. During the first few weeks of each semester, all the parking lots regularly filled up, and the college's security force needed to provide parking on grassy areas as well. During most other times, ample parking was available in the west parking lot.

Providing "designated parking" for public library patrons was impossible, because any college student or faculty member could also be a public library patron. To address the additional demand, the two agencies decided instead to jointly fund an additional parking lot on the far northeast side of the campus. This parking lot would provide an additional 150 spaces for college students, faculty, and staff, freeing up 150 parking spaces in the west lot for public library patrons. The new lot was opened just prior to spring semester 1999. Although parking has presented difficulties during the first few weeks of each semester at certain peak hours, the arrangement has been working well the rest of the time.

### SPREADING THE WORD

At 76,000 square feet, the College Hill Library would be the largest in the area between Denver and Boulder, Colorado. The size of the project, and its innovative nature, generated excitement in the community. The biggest public relations challenge was to inform the public that the new library really would be a public library open to all, despite its location on the college campus. To that end, we planned a major groundbreaking ceremony and a grand opening day celebration with many children's entertainers, multicultural dance groups, refreshments, and giveaways, to which each agency equally contributed. We highlighted our large and beautiful children's library to send the message that this was definitely more than a college library. We placed a multipage, full-color insert in the local paper and sent extra copies of the insert to all residents who lived within close range of the new library. The City of Westminster's newspaper, *City Edition*, featured stories about the new library in several issues: when the Intergovernmental Agreement was signed; after the groundbreaking; and close to the time of our opening.

After the Grand Opening celebration on April 24, 1998, business began to pick up significantly, and by the time the Westminster Public Library's summer reading program for children started in June, word of the beautiful new children's library had spread. Young families heavily populate the residential areas around the new library, and this fact is reflected in our children's circulation statistics. Excited parents and children found the library first, and word spread from there.

Front Range Community College students and faculty have also made heavy use of the new library since its opening. The additional seating, meeting room, and study spaces have relieved the overcrowding that was a constant problem in the former library. The two libraries' combined reference, periodical, and electronic database collections offer more for the students than either library could have offered on its own. Many students with children are regular users of the children's library, and high school students are using the college's large media collection and reference collection. Less than two years after opening its doors, College Hill celebrated its millionth patron visit, and the two millionth patron milestone was reached after another year had passed.

### PROS AND CONS

After seven years of operation, the pluses and minuses of this joint venture are now clear. The facility has been amazingly popular, with checkouts of public library materials alone reaching 1,061,821 for the year 2004. The public library has been able to make regular use of the computer instruction room to offer a variety of classes to the public. The whole range of college and public library materials is available under one roof, and the building

offers much more space and seating for each group during the many times when the building is chiefly used by the public (term breaks and holidays) or by the students/faculty (early mornings). Staff from the two libraries have worked together to sponsor cultural programs, solve problems, and deal with difficult issues such as Internet policies. On an informal basis, collection development staff cooperate in their selection decisions, stretching both agencies' budgets a little farther. Very few problems have come up between the two staffs, and those that have were quickly resolved.

On the negative side, making joint decisions about building maintenance and security expenses can sometimes be tricky because the budget cycles of the two institutions are very different. Scheduling the public meeting rooms has required greater staff involvement and has required more staff time than previously thought. Some decisions can be more complicated because there are more parties involved (for instance, some information technology [IT] decisions can require approval from IT administrators on both sides). But on the whole, the experience of sharing this library has been overwhelmingly positive to date, and staff continue to be committed to making it remain so for many years to come.

#### AN UPDATE ON COLLEGE HILL

This article concludes with updates from the new college library director and the public library manager, both of whom were new to their posts in 2004.

##### *Observations of the New College Library Director*

Beyond the benefit of being able to work in this beautiful facility, another factor in accepting this position was the knowledge that both the public library manager and I would be new to our positions. From my perspective, this unique circumstance would lend itself to a comprehensive examination on our part of the policies and procedures associated with the joint use operation. Knowing that the ongoing success of any library depends upon flexibility, innovation, and a constant reassessment of community needs, this type of analysis will afford us the opportunity to build upon the success of the current arrangement. The monthly meetings scheduled with my counterpart and our respective supervisors underscore this, and it certainly demonstrates the city's and college's commitment to maximizing the effectiveness of this operation.

Of course, one factor that will never change is that the joint use partnership between the city and the college does lead to a certain degree of accommodation on the part of both libraries. As one would suspect, compromise is the mantra of any joint use partnership, and it is routinely developed here to facilitate the different missions of each library as well as the specific needs of its clientele. These compromises can place limits

on the flexibility of each organization, and, at times, may impact the ability of each to focus exclusively on its primary mission. However, on a daily basis our patrons clearly remind us that the pros of this partnership by far outweigh any of the negative consequences.

*Update from the New Public Library Manager*

Nine months ago, when I took over as the manager for the Public Library side of this joint facility, we faced a challenge. The former manager of the Westminster Public Library had relocated to England, and the director for the Front Range Community College Library had retired the same summer. With this, we lost the informal history of how the staffs had worked together over the years to provide service. There was concern that we had lost the story of our joint facility. Each side of the house had new leaders who needed to learn the unique aspects of their jobs as related to their specific employer.

This newness was combined with the tension of the Westminster Public Library opening a new, very busy branch library. Whereas in the past the College Hill Library had been the primary focal point for staff and services, the new branch library pulled away part of that focus. The shared IT staff—part of our joint operating agreement—now needed to spend a significant part of the year getting the branch library up and running. With so many adjustments to make, our tendency was to revert to an “us” and “them” mentality, leading to a feeling that we were two tenants sharing the same building instead of a joint facility. To ameliorate this sense of drifting from our joint mission, both directors have worked to reinstate some ideas from the early days of the partnership, for example, joint staff meetings, joint meetings to discuss automation issues, and joint adult reference meetings. Additionally, the two managers and our supervisors meet for breakfast once a month to discuss the long-term plans of the city and the college. Plans are in the works to draw up a new joint mission statement, allowing a recycling of sorts, by taking the best from our past and tying it into our future.

**NOTE**

1. See <http://frontrange.edu> for more information.
2. See <http://www.broward.edu/libraries/index.jsp> and <http://www.broward.edu/libraries/pine/index.jsp> for more information.

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Warren Taylor was born and raised in Denver, Colorado, USA. Warren earned a Master of Arts Degree in Library Science from the University of Denver. He also

earned a Master of Arts Degree in Anthropology from the University of Colorado. In addition Warren earned a Ph. D. in Higher Education Administration from the University of Denver. He retired as Director of the Library, Media Center and Center for Instructional Design and Development at Front Range Community College. Prior to that Warren served as Director of Facilities Use, Research and Planning at the Auraria Higher Education Center. Dr. Taylor was the Assistant Director and tenured assistant professor at the Auraria Library and the University of Colorado at Denver. He taught in the School of Business at the University of Colorado at Denver as well as the Computer Information Systems program at Front Range Community College.

Mary Grace Barrick is the Library Manager for the City of Westminster Colorado Libraries. She received her undergraduate degree from the University of Michigan, and her M.S.L.S. from Wayne State University in Detroit. She has worked in Academic, Community College, Medical and Public Libraries.

Roger Stelk is currently the Director of Library Services at Front Range Community College, Westminster CO. Before arriving at the College Hill Library, Stelk worked as the coordinator for collection development at DePaul University, as the director of public services for Hunter Library at Western Carolina University, as the coordinator of the Reference/Information Desk in Love Library at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, and as a reference librarian/bibliographer for Newman Library at Virginia Tech. Stelk is a member of the American Library Association, the Association for College and Research Libraries, and the Colorado Association of Libraries. He has served on several ALA/ACRL committees and is the co-author of a number of articles on libraries. Stelk has a masters in library and information science from the University of Illinois at Urbana/Champaign as well as a MA and BA from Southern Illinois University-Carbondale.