MOHAWK COLLEGE LAUNCHES THE E-LIBRARY @ FENNELL CAMPUS
by Jo-Anne Westerby

Is a library really a library if it doesn’t have books? Mohawk College is about to find out! On January 12, 2004, the e-Library @ Fennell Campus opened its doors. Oops, back up. The e-Library virtually opened its doors. No...the e-Library is not just virtual. It does indeed have walls. It just doesn’t have any doors. So...no books, no doors. Intrigued? Read on.

The current Library @ Fennell Campus is landlocked. Far too small for the current student population, there is no possibility for the library to grow up, down or out and there are no plans yet to start from scratch. So, when the college began planning for a new IT Centre and the original drawings came back with a Cyber café in the design, library staff seized the opportunity and presented an innovative concept for that space...the e-Library @ Fennell.

The e-Library is an architecturally spectacular space, strategically located at the main entrance to Mohawk College’s dynamic new Information Technology Centre (designed by architect Bill Curran, then of Moffat Kinoshita Architects Inc., Hamilton). The library soars to a full two-story height. Two outside walls of pure glass look out onto a busy City of Hamilton street. Citizens see learning happening as they pass by on their day-to-day journeys. The interior space is partially open to the Centre’s second floor. A cozy fireplace dominates the lone wall. A Winter Garden is home to oleander and bougainvillea, while a family of goldfish hover under the waterfall.

@MoCo.café offers an intoxicating range of specialty coffees, soothing tisanes and a mean chocolate explosion brownie! The Rotunda, a dynamic multimedia showcase zone, shares the entrance to the IT Centre. Classrooms and specialty computer labs flank the e-Library to the right. The Commercialization Centre abuts the e-Library to the left. Upstairs is the Mohawk Centre for Innovation and Applied Research, and more. The e-Library is truly the hub of the building.

Students can use the e-Library during all campus open hours. Some of the high tech programs at Mohawk adopted a mobile model this semester. At the end of class, these connected students leave the collaborative classroom and make a beeline to the e-Library next door to continue the learning experience. They grab a java and settle in at the bar rail in front of the windows or lounge in front of the fireplace to carry on the discussion or the assignment – usually online! In-house computing equals choice. PCs are available for one-stop-shopping information needs. Thin client technology is being piloted for all things web through a partnership with SUN Microsystem to settle down with a personal laptop and log on through the College’s new private network. The e-Library is wireless and wired. Pick your speed! Battery life? Electrical outlets abound. All in-house computers launch at The BRAIN – Mohawk College’s Virtual Library. Students are one click away from library e-services: databases, web resources, e-books, e-tutorials, BRAIN_blogs, and VAL - Mohawk/Seneca/George Brown/Algonquin College’s synchronous chat Virtual Reference Desk service.

Students choose how to ask for help. Information staff navigate on dual screen laptops at the service desk. But more and more, reality finds them on their feet, roving through the electric crowd offering just in time, in-your-face information assistance right at the moment of need. With pilot project funding, a computer technician helps staff the zone, fielding hardware and software queries. Side by side with students, staff recharge with double lattes and those famous brownies! Service isn’t limited to the e-Library! Information assistance often spills into the Rotunda, the hallways, throughout the lounge areas around the Centre and potentially in the classroom. Truly, a library without doors! e-Library staff work their offdesk hours in the Right BRAIN Think Tank on the e-Library’s second floor, where they look out over the e-Library through glass walls. This creative and vibrant trio is staffing Virtual Reference, thinking about PDAs in the library environment, maintaining the library’s Blogs, designing a usability study for the website, planning for push technology to target groups through the upcoming college portal, and crafting self-help tutorials for distanced programs and all those independent types. All the while they are pushing the envelope, networking inside and outside the college, and monitoring RSS feeds to stay out there on the bleeding edge of library and information technology and services. Our Left BRAIN Think Tank, where web resources are culled, evaluated and organized, is still housed across campus in the full-service Library @ Fennell. At Common Hour, the e-Library is experimenting with the notion of the library as a social and cultural place with on-going programming lined up. Music events, lectures, and multi-media presentations are being planned. So...is a library really a library if it doesn’t have books? Here at Mohawk College we think so, and we’re out to prove it’s true. Drop by and check us out! We’ll rev you up with a tour, a cappuccino and a brownie!

The e-Library @ Fennell, Mohawk College in Hamilton...where it’s @ls.