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A space where literacy happens

Welcome to the new Cayuga Library & Heritage Centre



Kathy Renwald
OPINION

A little kid cuddles a toy dinosaur, teenagers sit in a cosy booth, and a senior reading the paper glances out the window at the converging four corners of downtown Cayuga.

This is the new Cayuga Library & Heritage Centre.

A community hub respectful of the past but firmly rooted in today.

Entering the angular, agriculturally inspired building, designed by Thier+Curran Architects of Hamilton, visitors pass farm tools, a bear trap, the weathered door from the old Canfield Exchange Hotel on their way to the latest books and videos.

The fluid combination of a library and museum, regarded with skepticism by some in the rural community, is a hit.

"People who come into a library may never have gone to the museum, says Karen Richardson Curator of the Haldimand County Museum and Archives.

"Young families come in to get kids books and the children run into the museum, and they are fascinated by it."

The space is cheerful and inviting. Warm vibrant colour comes from the walls and carpets and whimsical glass light fixtures. Exposed ceiling beams evoke a hayloft, generous windows frame a wide view of trees and clouds and low-rise buildings in a town where there are no skyscrapers.

With varied seating choices in cabana like booths, club chairs, and childlike forts, patrons are lingering longer than they did in the old library.

Thier+Curran associate Kyle Slotte was charged with the job to "create the perfect place for a kid to read a book."

"I have young kids, so I took sketches home and we drew together. The blanket forts they create, the nooks they find in their bunk beds, the things they do, they instinctively created space where literacy happens," Slotte says.

Most days the little hideaways are filled with kids and parents reading books together. They come from a few blocks away or in Priscila Tavares's case from a



JOHN RENNISON THE HAMILTON SPECTATOR

Exposed ceiling beams evoke a hayloft inside Cayuga's new Library and Heritage Centre.

Architects strove for a wow factor in the building's design.



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Graham Bachiu reads to son, Malcolm, and daughter, Olive Duguary Bachiu, in one of the comfy, cosy child-friendly reading nooks.

cottage on Lake Erie.

"We like it here, it's comfy, cosy and it's safe for the kids."

To avoid what he sees as the bland, sterile, machine like-design of many new libraries, architect Bill Curran pushed for the type of warm, textured, colourful space that would wow the firm's real clients.

"We designed it for the two-year-olds of Cayuga," he says.

Working with a big committee including members from the museum and library boards and municipality, Curran says the firm needed to push against small town conservatism to strive for architectural excellence and a wow factor.

Spending Curran says was also on a tight leash.

"We had to tease a good building out of a tight budget."

Anchoring the intersection of Talbot Street (Highway 3) and Cayuga Street, the library uses the same common bond brick pattern of two fine buildings nearby, the post office and a bank, but avoids copying the past by adding corrugated metal to reference the rural strength of Haldimand County.

"The galvanized is right off the farm," Curran says of the material used in grain bins and silos.

The undulating roof breaks down the mass of the blocky building, and throughout the structure the goal was to "tweak common materials to look like more than they are."

During the process, Haldi-



KATHY RENWALD

mand County chief administrative officer Craig Manley championed the idea of combining the museum and the library in a statement building that would help revitalize the downtown.

"The library is really important in a small town, it helps people meet each other, for newcomers it's one of the first places they visit. We wanted people to be welcomed into the building."

Cayuga is changing. It's in the migration path of people looking for an affordable lifestyle. Some end up in the Cayuga Library archives, where Karen Richardson helps them discover the history of their homes

and Haldimand County.

"We have farm journals in our collection, letters between sisters describing everyday life, and the poignant letters between World War I soldiers and their mothers. It's all about the stories."

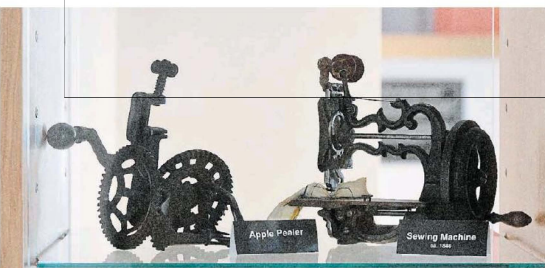
In November those soldier's stories will be part of the next exhibition about the two World Wars.

Visitors who may just be returning a book will also see Haldimand's heritage as they walk through the door.

Museum meets library in the centre of town.

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Artifacts on display in the new Library and Heritage Centre in Cayuga.



The Canadian National Exhibition Science Award won in 1926 is now on display.

Photo: © The Haldimand County Board of Cultural Services Exhibition 1926

READERS WRITE

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Learning about my father

Re: Cayuga Library

I enjoyed reading Kathy Renwald's article re. the Cayuga Library. I had the opportunity to visit there a couple of weeks ago and it certainly did attain the "Wow" factor. It is a great place for children, parents and people to visit and pick up books to read. A lovely comfortable cosy place to spend some leisure time.

But my surprise came when I saw how the museum had been integrated within the new building. It was so interesting to learn about our past history. Also, the curator Karen Richardson showed me how to bring up the war records of my father Tom Shea, who was a veteran of the First World War. Tom Shea was in the 114th Battalion and lost his leg in the Battle of Loos, France, in September 1915.

I read how five other men in the trench with him were killed and he laid there in the mud for three days before medical help came. By this time gangrene had set in and his leg had to be amputated. With Remembrance Day coming soon it is fitting to read about the past wars and just what we are commemorating on Nov. 11.

Joan Miller, Hamilton