



New Cayuga Library and Heritage Centre soft opening a firm success

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Cayuga Public Library & Heritage Centre opened to the public August 6. - Tara Lindemann/Torstar

The beloved musty quirks of Cayuga's old public library were relegated to sentimental history with the soft opening of its innovative replacement Aug. 6.

Amid the excited din, six-year old Tyler Riewald efficiently summed the reactions of many.

"It's awesome!"

He and his family explored the expansive child and youth section, illuminated by both Wonderland-esque lamps and natural light emanating from the floor to rafter windows overlooking the shaded corner of Talbot Road and Munsee Street.

Curved, low-rise book shelves sheltered a table where parents and toddlers played with an array of developmental learning toys.

Ashley Mackay's children settled into one of the cushioned nooks.

"This is our new spot. It's so nice to have a space to play and read," said Mackay.

Her mother Kelly Clappison nodded and listed many programs being offered.

"What great incentive to spend time here. As farmers, we get lost in the daily chaos. This refocuses on relearning and growing and we don't have a lot out here to do that."

Ardent library supporter, Catherine Stidsen, facilitates a spirituality book circle and walked around the sizeable meeting room.

"I am delighted at the prospect of this space."

Across the vibrant meeting room is a more muted alcove holding the museum's treasures. There are no doors here, except one on display and the open room offers patrons the ability to weave between library materials and historic curiosities organized by curator Karen Richardson. Her heritage exhibit, *Back to Our Roots*, features artifacts from Haldimand County's first exhibition, held in 1933 at the Cayuga courthouse.

"It's a fascinating collection, said Richardson. "It's quite eccentric."

She is pleased with the move.

"This is exactly what I've wanted for so long — making history accessible to everyone."

The previously hidden archives are now next to the service desk and Don Stewart poured through his genealogy with great interest, finding things about his family he hadn't known.

"It's wonderful," he said before returning to the pages.

Haldimand County Library CEO Paul Diette sees the heritage centre as something new and different for visitors.

"The synergies between museum and library are vital to our communities," he said.

"The exhibit gives something new and different for visitors. It's fresh, it's lively and expands horizons for our existing museums."

Diette circled about, assisting patrons and basking in the hum of activity that surrounded him.

He also addressed ongoing safety concerns regarding the centre's proximity to the Highway 3 commercial thoroughfare.

"In a small town, this is certainly a busy intersection," said Diette. "But I find that people tend to be more careful in a busy intersection."

And Diette is proud of the achievements of this building.

"Whether you use the library or not, these public spaces are important. We should take pride in them."