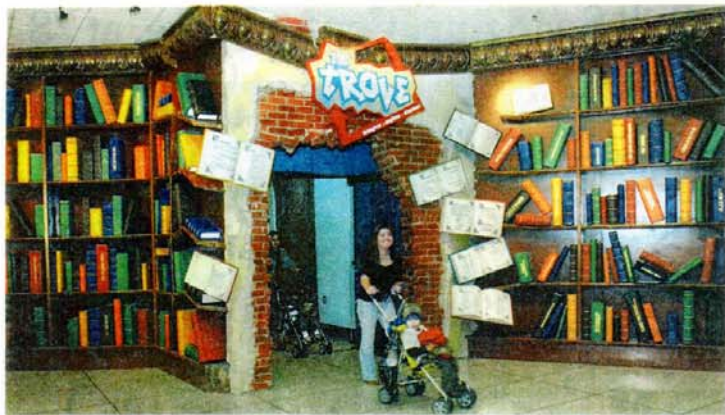


WESTCHESTER AT ITS BEST



Photographs by Susan Farley for The New York Times

The White Plains Public Library recently opened The Trove, its new children's library, above and below.

Reinventing the Library As Literary Playground

By ROBERTA HERSHENSON

WHITE PLAINS

WHEN Sandra C. Miranda, director of the White Plains Public Library, first thought about expanding the children's rooms at the library, she knew only that she was aiming for something spectacular.

"It was impossible to describe what I wanted to do," she said recently, as she sat under a fabricated copper beech tree in The Trove, a 13,000-square-foot literary playground that opened in late October on the library's second floor. "It needed to be a cross between a bookstore and a children's museum."

The new space, financed by \$2 million from the city and \$1 million in private contributions, was designed for children from babies through sixth graders.

Its bookstore appearance comes from the arrangement of some books with their colorful covers showing, rather than spine-out in traditional library fashion (although there are plenty of spine-out sections, too). Fiction and nonfiction books are

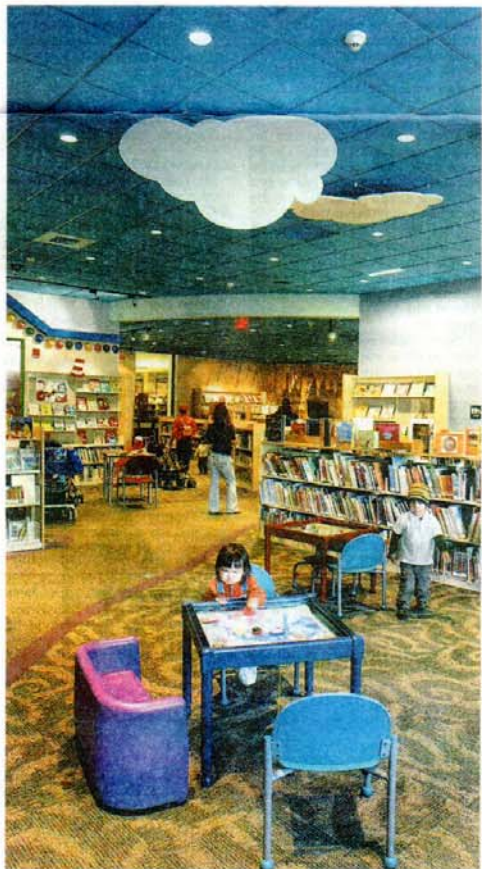
A children's adventure opens up amid the stacks.

grouped together by subject, providing a chance to delve deeply into topics like space travel.

The museum atmosphere comes from the artful décor — simulated woodlands, a sky radiant with stars — and the fanciful structures that double as reading nooks and activity centers. These include the Sailaway, a reading perch shaped like a ship's stern; the Castle, an activity room for crafts and tutoring; a technology center called the CyberPool, with a vinyl floor that evokes the surface of a pond; and the Cave, whose painted stalagmites and stalactites enclose a flat screen for viewing DVD's and television specials.

Even the main desk is presented as an adventure, with a world map stretching overhead on a dome dotted with the names of classic children's books.

The space reflects practical insights as well as aesthetic ones. Rooms meant for older children are in front, so that sixth graders do not have to pass through tots' activities, and toddlers cannot easily wander away. The Copper Beech Garden, with its leaf-patterned floor and light maple benches, is a corner where children can eat a snack brought from home (no food is sold) and keep on reading.



The Whisper Tube has something to say to Jake and Gianna Pasacreta of White Plains. (The voice sounds a lot like their mother's.)

Ms. Miranda, who has been the director since 1989, said her guiding premise was that the library had to be reinvented for a new generation of children and their parents. "We live in a self-gratification, entertainment society," she said. "For the generations now, the whole concept of the children's library as we have known and loved it doesn't resonate the same way."

She wanted a name for the space other than "library" — one that would "build curiosity and a buzz," she said. So a consulting firm came up with The Trove.

Dawn Pasacreta of White Plains, who was visiting the library on a recent afternoon with her two children, Jake, 4, and Gianna, 3, said the new space was "incredible, the best library in Westchester." Gianna said her favorite place was the Cave. Jake liked the Whisper Tube, or, as he called it, the "talking tree," where children can press an ear to hear someone talking to them from across the room.

The Trove is on the second floor of the White Plains Public Library, 100 Martine Avenue, White Plains. (914) 422-1476.

The Little Library Around the Corner

A successful children's library "nurtures and encourages children's intellectual curiosity," according to Judith Rovenger, youth services consultant at the Westchester Library System, based in Ardsley. Such places offer "more than just knowledge and facts," she said.

In addition to The Trove at the White Plains Public Library, Ms. Rovenger cited the efforts of the following libraries:

ARDSLEY PUBLIC LIBRARY, 9

American Legion Drive,

(914) 693-6636, and

BEDFORD FREE LIBRARY, on the

Village Green, (914) 234-3570, are

small, with a warm, intimate

quality, Ms. Rovenger said, especially

in their story hours.

CHAPPAQUA CENTRAL SCHOOL

DISTRICT PUBLIC LIBRARY, 195

South Greeley Avenue, (914) 238-

4779, is a larger library, Ms.

Rovenger said. "They have storytellers of international fame on staff."

THE FIELD LIBRARY, PEESKILL, 4

Nelson Avenue, (914) 737-0847,

has a community effort to extend

the children's department and

creative programming such as

an overnight at the library.

IRVINGTON PUBLIC LIBRARY, 12

South Astor Street, (914) 591-

7840, is described by Ms. Rovenger

as "a small library with a

very warm librarian."

NEW ROCHELLE PUBLIC LIBRARY,

HUGENOT CHILDREN'S LIBRARY,

794 North Avenue, (914) 632-8954,

is a branch devoted exclusively

to children's books and materi-

als.

OSSINGEN PUBLIC LIBRARY, 33

Croton Avenue, (914) 941-2416, is

building a new library, scheduled

to be completed next fall, with an

expanded children's library.