

Hundreds show up for the opening of the Walnut Creek Library

By Elisabeth Nardi
Contra Costa Times

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It didn't take long for 4-year-old Hayden Hodges to find his favorite seat in the new Walnut Creek Library. There was just enough room for Hayden and his 1-year old sister, Kelly, to sit propped on a giant orange cushion in a window box in the children's section. The pair gazed back and fourth between the stacks of books around them and the world outside — nestled in Hayden's lap was a book about a dog taking a bath.

"We have been waiting for this for months and months; we walk by it all the time," said their mother, Heather Hodges. "We have been here for only five minutes and we are already completely in love with it."

After being under construction for two years, hundreds of people on Saturday came to the opening of the 40,000-square-foot, \$39.9 million library in Civic Park.

After a short reception, at which Mayor Sue Rainey officially declared the library open, people flooded the three main entrances and filled each nook and corner of the place. Especially popular was the 5,000-square-foot children's section. Storytime began about 10 minutes after the doors opened and

youngsters quickly settled on the multicolored carpet.

Other activities for opening day included a puppet show and docents from the Walnut Creek Historical Society dressed up as historic Walnut Creek founders while showing their historical display across from the fireplace in the reference area.

The two-story, sleekly designed building — with a

curving roof and tree branches etched into an indoor glass wall — incorporates images of nature. The curving-line design on the floor and tables simulates the flow of the city's creeks.

Rainey said the library is the most beautiful in the state and she thanked the community for helping to make it happen. She acknowledged that the library has caused controversy; some residents think it's too big and cost too much. But when people experience the library they'll understand it has been worth the time, cost and effort, she said.

"We are here on a historic moment," she said.

But for all the bells and whistles — including 94 public computers and a 65-inch television screen for video game playing in the teen section — many on Saturday quickly found a book and a good place to sit and began reading.

"It's very, very nice," said Wendy Deach a two-year Walnut Creek resident who headed for the fiction section and found a couple of books and a chair by a window. "I found this little quiet area here. There seems to be plenty of room and so many nice chairs."

Audrey Ellison, 11, walked around the library

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amazed by what she saw.

"I like it. Just all of the books and it's so much nicer than the older library. It's so big," the Walnut Creek Intermediate School student said.

Her mother, Mindy Ellison, was captivated by the 26-foot-tall sculpture of a woman holding a finger her to her lips and saying, "Shhh." The \$300,000 piece created by artist Christian Moeller is called "Portrait in 12 Volumes of Gray." Up close the piece looks like little books in varying shades of gray, but take a view farther back and the image of the woman appears.

"This is so neat," Ellison said as she took photos with her camera phone. "You wouldn't know it was anything as you walk by it. But then you look at it and take a picture with your cell phone and you can see her — amazing."

Ed Del Beccaro, president of the Walnut Creek Library Foundation, presented a \$500,000 check, bringing the city's total contribution to \$4 million of its \$5 million pledge. The last \$1 million will be given during the fiscal year.

"Well, we did it," Del Beccaro told the crowd. "I wish I was 10 or 12 years old and got to use this library."

The project also included a 121-space underground parking garage, which was closed to most visitors Saturday but will open Monday.

The library, at 1644 N. Broadway, will be open 10 a.m.-8 p.m. Monday through Thursday, 10 a.m.-6 p.m. Friday and Saturday and will be closed Sundays.

Contact Elisabeth Nardi at 925-952-2617. Follow her at [Twitter.com/enardi10](https://twitter.com/enardi10).

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