

LIBRARY BRANCH WILL OPEN WHERE THE MASSES ARE

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There's something new on sale at Valley View Mall: the idea that instead of trying to bring people to the library, it's time to bring the library to the people.

Just in time for Citizens Appreciation Day, the Roanoke library system is opening its first "electronic" branch at the mall.

The upper-level kiosk opens Saturday morning. Patrons will be able to return library books there and collect books or DVDs they have reserved over the Internet from lockers.

The branch features the mall's first wireless Internet zone, and also will include a touch-screen computer and a small puppet theater. The first puppet show will begin at 10 a.m.

"I want us to have a retail presence," library system director Sheila Umberger said. "Libraries, we want to be everywhere."

Library representatives will hand out pamphlets detailing the project Saturday. Posters, balloons and costumed characters on the mall's lower level will point the way to the kiosk upstairs, tucked away in a corridor between J.C. Penney and Macy's.

At the new branch, patrons can reserve library materials online, and at that time they will get a pass code for a locker at the kiosk. On a future visit to the mall, they can pick up the item from the locker. Umberger said reserved items would be delivered in a few days.

About a dozen lockers will open Saturday, but the library has planned for the kiosk to have 50.

Patrons can use the touch-screen computer to find jobs, movie times and information about the city. They can access the library's main branch and the city's citizens help desk to talk to representatives there. Umberger said more touch-screen computers could appear if demand grows.

"We're going to start with this and see how it works," she said.

Although libraries around the country use kiosks in malls, Umberger said this one is the first to incorporate lockers, a touch-screen computer, a theater and a drop-off system. The library presented the idea to the city council on May 3, and council members approved of it.

"It truly is a library services delivery concept," Mayor Nelson Harris said. "You literally can pick up a book and drop off a book and can access the library system and that sort of thing. It's very practical and pragmatic and not just marketing."

Council members said they saw no big problems with the project and raised no objections.

"Until you do it, you don't know, but what we saw looked very simple, so to speak, for the average person like me to use," Councilman Brian Wishneff said.

So far, the project falls within the allocated budget of \$50,000. Umberger said library workers already are wondering where additional kiosks could go. She said she would like to see more in high-retail or underserved areas, including

one in Garden City.

Councilman Sherman Lea said he would like to see the electronic branch program expand, maybe even to Center in the Square, where there is plenty of foot traffic. Lea said he would definitely use the kiosk at the mall.

"I'm one man who loves to shop," he said. "I love the mall. I'm going take full advantage."

ELECTRONIC LIBRARY BRANCH

VALLEY VIEW MALL

OPENS: Saturday morning

WHERE: Upper level of mall, opposite LensCrafters

Features:

Drop-off facility for library materials; puppet shows; lockers; touch-screen computer; wireless Internet

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