

Expanded library dedication celebrates huge turnout

The Farmington Area Public Library held a dedication ceremony and celebration of the 12 Mile facility's expansion and remodeling Sunday.

City officials from Farmington and Farmington Hills dedicated the new building. Bev Papai, library director, said about 2,000 people attended the four-hour event and 2,710 items in that time were checked out by patrons.

The director said many people used the new self check-out system, similar to the way grocery stores allow customers to scan their own items for purchase. She said guests to the event were able to witness some behind-the-scenes action, like the library's new conveyor belt return system for books and materials.

The most overwhelming positive comments by guests concerned the library's new children's room. "A lot of people told me they had a hard time tearing their children away," Papai said.

The library, located east of Farmington Road, is open from 9 a.m.-9 p.m. Monday-Thursday, 9 a.m.-6 p.m. Friday and Saturday, and noon-6 p.m. Sunday.

By Paul R. Pace

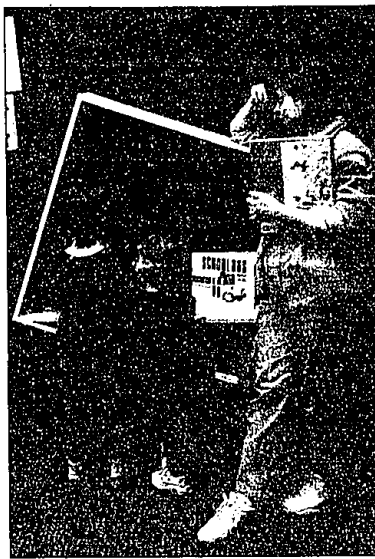
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Library Director Bev Papai received a standing ovation at the ceremony for her efforts during construction and renovation of the library.



Ken McRae explores the library with granddaughters Megan and Kiera McRae.



Mina and Gwen Cohen explore the Smart Start Learning Center with mom Lynn.

Traffic goes high tech in Oakland County

By Phil Foley
Staff Writer

It never seems to fail, the last traffic report you glance at on the TV as you leave the house for the morning commute always seems to be about a traffic tie-up in the next county or if you're wondering whether you should slide off I-75 onto a Mile Road because traffic is at a near standstill, the radio folks are happily chatting about a rollover near the airport.

The Road Commission for Oakland County's (RCOC) Real-time Traffic Map, located on the commission's Web site (www.rcocweb.org) has been giving area motorists the most complete and timely traffic picture in the state since 1989.

"One of our goals," said commission spokesman Craig Bryson, "is to not only inform the public, but to reduce traffic congestion."

RCOC's Real-Time Traffic Map displays information from Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT) sensors buried in the county's expressways as well as the commission's more than 140 FAST-TRAC cameras around the county. That means that someone working on Farmington

Hills' south side can discover with a couple of mouse-clicks that while the average speed of traffic eastbound I-96 is 34 mph, traffic on Grand River, which has a posted speed of 45 mph, is light.

The Real-Time Traffic Map is an outgrowth of the commission's Fast-Trac system, which began a decade ago with 28 controlled intersections in Troy. Since then the system has expanded to more than 140 intersections across the county and, according to Bryson, plans call for the expansion of the system to cover more than 1,100 intersections.

"We're adding 25 to 50 a year," said Bryson. FAST-TRAC stands for Faster And Safer Travel Through Routing and Advanced Controls. It was modified from the Sydney Coordinated Adaptive Traffic System, which was developed in Australia 30 years ago. The system uses video imaging equipment to monitor traffic flows, and that information is used by computers to alter traffic light patterns.

Not quite four years ago the commission began displaying that data on its Real-Time Traffic Map. According to Bryson it's the only system of its

kind in Michigan, although officials in Wayne, Macomb and Genesee counties are giving serious thought to installing systems of their own.

Recently RCOC officials added two new pieces of data to the Real-Time Traffic Map. They are real-time weather information from the three RCOC weather stations, including one near Steeth and Wixom roads, and MDOT's freeway changeable message signs.

While Wixom Assistant City Manager Tony Nowicki lives only eight miles from his office, he said he thinks the commission's Real-Time Traffic Map is "a valuable resource." He said that while he mainly uses the commission's Web site to keep track of the pace of road commission projects in his city, he can see that for commuters, "it's a very valuable tool."

According to Bryson, one key piece of information that residents can only get on from the Real-Time Traffic Map is pavement temperatures. He said that's important because while the weatherman may be report that the air temperature is in the 40s because a warm front is moving in, the pavement may still be holding at 20 degrees, because it's been cold for weeks

and that means you can still have icy roads and bridges.

Right now that information is only available from the county's three weather recording sites, but according to Bryson, the commission eventually plans to have infrared sensors capable for monitoring a variety of road conditions mounted on all 120 of its salt trucks, as well as its 20 road graders. Some two to three years down the road, Novi motorists may have all that information at their fingertips as the RCOC network of fixed and mobile sensors relay information to the website.

"This is cutting edge stuff," said Bryson. "This is brand new technology that's evolving as it's implemented. Our contractors are inventing things as they go along."

Today, the primary users of the RCOC's website are local radio and television stations. Typically, said Bryson, the site gets a few hundred hits a day. "But anytime there's had weather, visits jump dramatically."

However, said Bryson, "the missing link is on-board navigation." He said the "864,000 questions is how to get all that information directly to people

on the road."

Currently the information on the Real-Time Traffic Map is updated every two minutes. That means that by the time you've backed your car out of the driveway, everything may have changed.

Still, he said, much of the technology is in place to give motorists real-time traffic information in their cars in the not-too-distant future.

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