LIBRARY

FROM PAGE A1

Workers were putting finishing touches on a videoconferencing center Tuesday. The room is equipped with special projection equipment.

"This is really directed toward the business community," Papai said, "to allow them to do conferencing all over the world."

She added a staff member will be appointed to oversee all of the library's new high-tech offerings; no one has been selected, but some staffers do have technical experience and training.

On the main and lower levels, the newly expanded facility blends high-tech amenities with special areas focused on local history, business connections and reading readiness for children. It is part hands-on learning, part art gallery, part café.

And don't forget the books, thousands of them.

The newest ones will be kept on "signature shelving," which has a little more flair but the same cherrywood finish as the regular stacks.

There's even a section for those offered for sale by the Friends of the Library.

The café, aptly named The Book Mark, is operated by Mary Koczara, a Farmington Hills resident and former owner of the Coffee Beanery in Twelve Oaks Mall. She said her menu will be very similar, offering flavored coffees, tea, hot chai, pound cake, muffins, bagels and maybe even soup, depending on customer response.

Patrons will be able to take their drinks and food into the library; Koczara has done research to find cups with lids that are less inclined to spill.

"We hope they're very successful," Papai quipped, "because the library gets a percentage of their profits."

Librarian Tina Thiecke said the success of a self check-out in the children's section of the downtown Farmington library should be mirrored in similar machines in the Hills. A scanner reads bar-coded library cards and computer chips embedded in materials.

The chips are also part of the new automated check-in machinery, which Thiecke said will likely gain a great deal of public attention.

Workers from Minnesota-based Tech Logic Systems were in the library this week making sure the system is fully operational.

Books come in through drop slots and pass under a chip reader above a conveyor belt, Thiecke explained.

They are then sorted and dropped onto a stand that automatically loads the books into carts.

"When you check out over a million books a year, it's really going to minimize the manual labor involved in handling," she said.

But the most popular part of the library — at least for the younger set — will most certainly be the children's section in the lower level. Papai said the library board didn't decide to expand that area until August of last year.

Eighteen months ago, she visited St. Paul, Minn., to see the Tech Logic book sorting system in action and the Minnesota Children's Museum.

"It really made me think about why we're in business and what our role should be," she said.

Rather than being "doers,"

BILL BRESLER | STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

The new library addition is open to patrons.

librarians are now more facilitators, doing what they can to support and help a child's first and best teachers: parents.

From a child-controlled video at the foot of the stairs to permanent learning stations like "Play It" or "Hear It," the library's lower level is directed toward improving reading readiness in children from toddlers on up.

Called "Smart Start," the project is funded through the Farmington Friends of the Library.

It's mission is simple: To serve as a hands-on, interactive learning environment for children ages 6 and under and their adult guests.

The "Tell It" station, for example, is constructed like a giant book that can be opened for story time. The inside is tackable material for visual aids, and shelving keeps the collection of stuffed animals and other props librarians use in order.

In "Build It," parents with toddlers can set their children inside a play area that allows them to safely crawl through, enjoying special images and toys that act as sensory input.

"The whole object is to help connect the little synapses in the brain," Papai said. "Each station also has a list of activities parents can do with their children at home."

Dinosaurs have invaded an elementary learning room, the Kokoro dinosaurs from California.

They were made by the same company that did the creatures for the movie *Dinotopia*, however because they aren't mechanized, kids can have a more hands-on experience.

"These are intentionally touchable," Papai said.

On Sunday, parents will be able to take pictures of their children sitting on a half-size triceratops. The head of a T-Rex pops out of the opposite wall, mouth agape.

A special, limited exhibit features fossilized dinosaur remains enclosed in a deep wooden box filled with sand. Kids will be given brushes and the opportunity to play paleontologist, uncovering the bones from eons past.

The University of Michigan Natural Science Museum is helping with that area, which also includes a table where kids can create rubbings of different types of dinosaurs.

Library dedication details

The Farmington Hills branch of the Farmington Community Library at 32737 W. 12 Mile Road in Farmington Hills, will be dedicated Sunday, Jan. 26.

The grand opening celebration will be held from 2-6 p.m., with a dedication ceremony at 3 p.m. in the second floor meeting room. Light refreshments will be catered by the library's Book Mark Coffee Cafe.