

Editorial: New library in Lafayette is a major community asset

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THERE ARE FEW services local government provides that are more important than libraries. Yes, police, fire protection and schools are essential. But, after that, when we look for an institution that provides a place of community, a place for people of all ages to learn and grow intellectually, it's our libraries.

That's why **we're ecstatic to see the opening of the new Lafayette Library and Learning Center**, the culmination of a decade of community planning. City Manager Steven Falk is so right when he says that it's the most important public improvement in the city's 40-year history. **With the advent of the Internet, the role of libraries has expanded from a lender of books and periodicals to an information and learning center.**

The elegant Lafayette facility, which opened over the weekend, is a testimonial to that with more than 30,000 square feet that includes space for more than 110,000 books, 42 public computers, 186 reader seats, three group study rooms, separate areas for teens and adults, an art and discovery center, and outdoor meeting and reading areas.

The \$42.5 million building was made possible by money from the city's redevelopment agency, state grants and \$12.5 million raised by the library foundation. **The community is fortunate that this project was started before the economy went into the tank and local governments were financially cut off at the knees.**

The Lafayette Center will be part of the financially struggling county library system, which absorbed a nearly 12 percent budget cut this year. That's why it's up to the cities to provide new facilities, as Orinda, Hercules and San Ramon have done in the last decade. Walnut Creek is expected to open its new library next year. And Pittsburg, Antioch, El Cerrito, Concord and Brentwood are hoping to do likewise in the future. Let's help them fulfill their dreams, too.