

Writing from the Lafayette library Sunday... If Walnut Creek's new library is anything like this place...



I might have a new hangout.

As I write this, it is Sunday afternoon, and I decided to work at the new Lafayette library—or, officially, the Lafayette Library and Learning Center.

Perhaps it will become my office away from my home office—or my work office. That is, until Walnut Creek opens its library in mid-July. (Yes, that "damn library.")

In the meantime, here at Lafayette's library, each table has someone like me sitting at it, typing away at laptop. The various sitting areas, with sofas and chairs, are occupied with people—kids, teens, soccer moms or dads, grandparents—reading magazines or books they are going to check out. Each of the smaller conference rooms contains one person or small groups of people working together. People occupy most of the 12 computers in the technology center, and several teens are sitting and working in the homework room.

Oh, and in the separate wing, which contains the children's area, a group of kids are gathered around a computer. Others are

poking through the book shelves, and a mom is sitting with her toddler, reading a story aloud.

It also looks like people are browsing the aisles, looking to check out—No way in our era of everything digital and everyone suffering from some form of attention deficit disorder—books!

This is my second visit to Lafayette's new three-level 30,000-square-foot library, and it's a lovely building. A quiet, inviting place to hang out, and read, do work, or, as I am now, blog (free wi-fi!)

It has soaring ceilings with exposed, rough-wood beams, tall glass windows, dark-wood tables and shelves, and outdoor decks and a garden. With paintings on the walls and cool, modernist sculptures filling some spaces, it's like a home I wouldn't mind living in.

I last visited last Saturday. I arrived just before 1 p.m., when the doors open on weekends, and people were standing outside, waiting to get in.



This is a busy place on weekends. It's like a coffee house, except I don't have to buy a latte and pastry in order to feel like I have the right to stick around.

As I've said in the past, I didn't involve myself one way or the other in expressing a viewpoint on Walnut Creek's effort to build its own new downtown library.

Maybe—I still think—Walnut Creek saw what its neighbors to the west were up to in Lafayette. If Lafayette could have a stylish new downtown library, Walnut Creek's civic and community leaders thought, so should Walnut Creek! Maybe there was some civic ego involved.

Also, as I've said in the past, I was fond of the old Walnut Creek downtown library.

But sitting now in Lafayette's new pride and joy, I can definitely see the advantage of a new, more spacious, comfortable, and user-friendly building. I can't say I ever wanted to hang out too long in Walnut Creek's dear old library.

Some say that libraries are a thing of the past—what with the advent of the Internet.

Well, this place I'm sitting in right now feels like a thing of the present and even the future.

As for people not going to libraries as much as in the past to obtain books, DVDs, or other materials? that's not the case. Walnut Creek Librarian Cindy Britain writes (in an e-mail shared with me by Walnut Creek Library Foundation Executive Director Kristen Anderson):

—In fiscal year 2007-08, the number of number of items checked out from Contra Costa County libraries was 6,132,207, a 13 percent increase over the 5,428,511 items circulated the year before.

—The greatest area of circulation growth is in fiction books, with a huge growth in the children's and young adult areas.

The *New York Times* reports that, especially during these economic hard times, libraries across the country are seeing double-digit increases in patronage, often from 10 percent to 30 percent, over previous years.

Brittain adds in her e-mail: "Providing pleasure reading is where we have excelled. Our circulation growth is quite impressively due to people doing more book reading! The figures show that choices to purchase large quantities of new releases has made us more relevant in people's lives. Biographies show great growth as well. Again, pleasure reading. Picture books and Easy Readers are the most popular of our text materials. More children's books are checked out than Young Adult and adult books combined."

Oh, and regarding complaints about the garage being built under Walnut Creek's library, and the added cost involved? Lafayette's has a below-ground garage, and I have to say it makes a visit here extremely convenient. In fact, trying to find street parking around this building, even on a Sunday when businesses are closed, would have been impossible.

Posted by AKA Soccer Mom at [8:54 AM](#)

17 comments: