

## A Forum on Library Construction

### *The John Richard Allison Library: Regent College, Vancouver, British Columbia*

*By Audrey Williams*

#### PROJECT OVERVIEW

**O**n the University Endowment Lands just outside the campus of the University of British Columbia in Vancouver, British Columbia, is found the John Richard Allison Library. Housed at Regent College, the library holds the joint collections of Regent College and nearby Carey Theological College.

Regent College was founded in 1968, and a formal agreement with Carey was signed in May of 1983, effectively creating the Regent Carey Library (now the John Richard Allison Library). After residing in temporary locations, Regent College, along with the library, moved into its new permanent facilities in the fall of 1988. Following a period of rapid growth in both its student population and its library collection, Regent eventually outgrew these accommodations.



*Circulation Area*

Between 2005 and 2007, Regent College spearheaded a building campaign designed nearly to double the size of the college. Co-chaired by the Campaign Executive Director Brent Fearon and the well-known Christian author and Professor Emeritus Eugene H. Peterson, the “Writing the Next Chapter” campaign exceeded its goal of \$14.5 million dollars. By God’s grace, the campaign realized increases in the number of donors, the number of donations received, and the aggregate amount of donations. The centerpiece of the campaign was a new 28,000-square-foot library, with the existing library space reassigned for use as additional classrooms, offices, and storage facilities.

Throughout the building phase, a live webcam continuously broadcasted in real time the progress of construction. The library was opened to the public in January of 2007, and the official opening of the library took place on Saturday, September 29, 2007, after all other renovations had been completed.

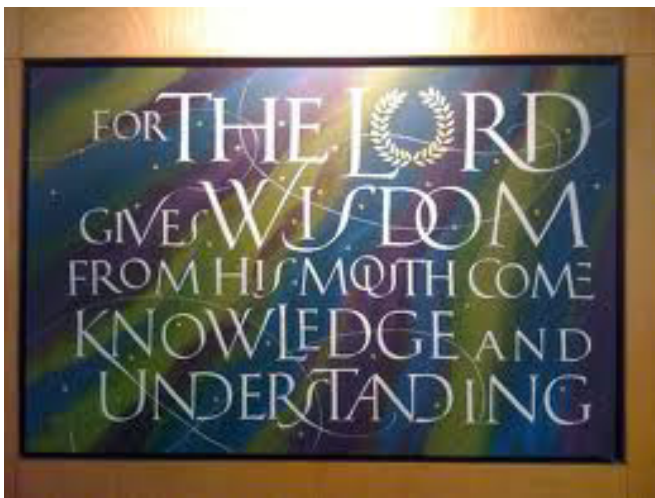
The architect for Regent’s original buildings, Clive Grout, was re-commissioned for the new project. Grout applied an overarching modern aesthetic to keep the new library integrated with the renovated parts of the academic structure. The library (costing \$10 million) was built underground at the north end of the campus, and connected to the existing lower floor by an expansive hallway lined by tall, custom-built display cabinets. Natural light streams into the library space via several reflective pools and a series of skylights placed strategically above study carrels, seminar rooms, and offices. Cindy Derrenbacher, the former Library Director, worked with Grout and other planners to incorporate features such as raised ceilings and display spaces for art that greatly minimize the visitor’s sense of being underground.

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*Audrey Williams is Technical Services Librarian at the John Richard Allison Library, Regent College.*



*Wind Tower*



*Calligraphy*



*Sculpture*

Once the library construction was completed, the roof above the John Richard Allison Library was returned to use as a public green space. Distinctive to the new park, however, is *True North/Lux Nova* ([http://www.sarahhallstudio.com/press/press\\_coverage/Vancouver%27s%20Solar%20Tower%20Sparks%20American%20Institute%20of%20Architects%20Award.pdf](http://www.sarahhallstudio.com/press/press_coverage/Vancouver%27s%20Solar%20Tower%20Sparks%20American%20Institute%20of%20Architects%20Award.pdf)), an AIA-award-winning forty-foot high wind tower. The collaborative work of Clive Grout, Walter Francl Architects, and glass artist Sarah Hall, the innovative structure serves both functional and artistic ([http://www.solaripedia.com/13/206/vancouver\\_wind\\_tower\\_employs\\_photovoltaics.html](http://www.solaripedia.com/13/206/vancouver_wind_tower_employs_photovoltaics.html)) purposes. As an alternative energy source, consistent with Regent's theology of environmental stewardship, the wind tower is designed to provide natural ventilation for the library's radiant heating system. Gracing the outside of the three-sided structure (reflective of the Trinity) is Hall's beautiful glass work. Each day photovoltaic cells soak up and store solar energy used later, at night, to illuminate her work, which encompasses the text of the Lord's Prayer, written in Aramaic.

Within the library are additional art installations which both enhance the esthetics of the surrounding space and represent Regent College's values. Two large murals, the commissioned work of well-known calligrapher Timothy Botts, are immediately visible upon entering the library. The promise of happiness through wisdom, as expressed so aptly in the artist's illustrated wisdom texts (Proverbs 2:6: "For the Lord Gives Wisdom. From His Mouth Comes Knowledge and Understanding"; and Proverbs 2:10: "For Wisdom Will Enter Your Heart and Knowledge Will Be Pleasant to Your Soul") resonates strongly with Regent's mission to "cultivate intelligent, vigorous, and joyful commitment to Jesus Christ, His Church, and His world."

Nearby stands David Robinson's sculpture "Font" ([http://www.robinsonstudio.com/various\\_works/2003-2.html](http://www.robinsonstudio.com/various_works/2003-2.html)), which is (<http://www.robinsonstudio.com/resources/statements/4.html>) informed by the "I am" sayings of Christ in the book of John.

A climate-controlled room was designed and built to house the growing number of rare books donated to the library. A system of compact shelving was chosen that maximizes storage potential, allowing for years of collection growth while still safely accommodating oversized volumes. The adjoining Rare Books Reading Room provides an appealing venue for both displaying rare items and accommodating serious researchers, all within the direct sight lines of Public Services staff. Within the last year a small archive was also created from one section of storage space in order to accommodate existing and expected archives. While archival-quality storage shelves and lighting have been installed, the archive is not yet climate controlled.

Considerable thought went into creating a space that would prove sufficient over time. Railings for compact shelves, embedded in the stacks area, anticipate future storage requirements. Wiring throughout the library was designed to accommodate future electronic needs. Flexible compact storage units allow for easy access to an increasing variety of media. Finally, a bibliographical instruction lab and three existing group study rooms could easily be reconfigured for alternative use should the need arise.

Library Director Cindy Derrenbacker involved library staff in planning some of the more detailed aspects of the building project. Together they discussed such issues as the strategic design of the circulation desk, communication and security factors, and the functionality of individual workstations. In addition, Public Services staff conducted a user survey that directly informed the selection of alternative seating options throughout the library.

## DISCUSSION

### **1. What was hardest and what was most rewarding about this project?**

From a staff perspective, the hardest aspect of the project was trying to continue to perform routine daily tasks in the midst of so many building- and moving-related activities. Most rewarding was the sense of being an active participant in such a beautiful and successful project, especially after seeing the ecstatic response the new library received from the Regent community.

### **2. How was the rest of your work affected by this challenge?**

Along with less time dedicated to perform daily tasks, it was hard not to get caught up in the excitement of ongoing project developments. Also challenging was finding ways to continue working when things were being moved and packed, when the builders created ongoing noise, and when there were interruptions to computer network access.

### **3. Is there one single thing you wish you had done differently?**

Although it was not part of the original vision, the need for an archive was realized not long after moving into the new facility.

### **4. What was the single most valuable piece of advice you received for this project?**

From what I observed, Cindy Derrenbacker (our director at the time) probably benefited most from a course in library planning in the School of Library, Archival, and Information Studies at the University of British Columbia, which she enrolled in concurrently with her work on the building project. Her faculty advisor, Dr. Ann Curry, provided Cindy with knowledgeable feedback on various design proposals.

### **5. What have people responded most favorably to so far?**

Most commonly, we as staff hear favorable comments on the brightness and beauty of the building and its art installations. Patrons appreciate the spaciousness of the library, its comfortable seating options, and spacious work carrels. Some value the library as a barrier-free zone; others appreciate it as a green space.

## **6. How do you see your library services being enhanced by this project so far?**

It is gratifying to welcome people into a beautiful facility that allows both freedom of movement and quiet work areas to engage in serious research and study. Public Services personnel benefit from the clear signage placed throughout the building and their well-organized and functional staff workstations. A seminar room, a bibliographical instruction classroom, and three group study rooms now accommodate scheduled classes and group work sessions. Library shelvees no longer need to frequently shift rows of books in order to make room for new acquisitions on the shelves. Staff can be confident knowing that the rare books are properly cared for in a controlled environment. In Technical Services there is adequate room for the receiving and storage of both incoming donations and backlogged items. The addition of a small kitchen is welcome both for staff and student workers.

## **7. Other observations of interest?**

I believe that the library benefited from bringing in expert library movers when it came time to shift the collections from the old to the new spaces. Staff members were positioned at either end to oversee the seamless transference of items. As well, each area of the new library was provided with a location code. When packing, staff would provide each box with the appropriate code that informed movers of where to deliver each carton.

A conscious decision was made to limit the additional shelves dedicated to print journal growth in anticipation of a future commitment to electronic serials.

