

Special:  
Long Island  
Real Estate Offerings

# Library Expansions Create Areas for the Very Young

## Family Place centers make libraries more appealing for families.

By CAROLE PAQUETTE

**Y**OUNG families with small children have become a major influence in new construction at many Long Island libraries as a 23-year-old project — called Family Place — specially geared to preschool children and their parents gains popularity and finances.

Faced with aging buildings and an increase in school enrollment, 11 of Long Island's 109 libraries have undertaken expansions or renovations of their children's sections in a way that sets aside Family Place areas. In most cases, the program previously occupied a small area or room in the building.

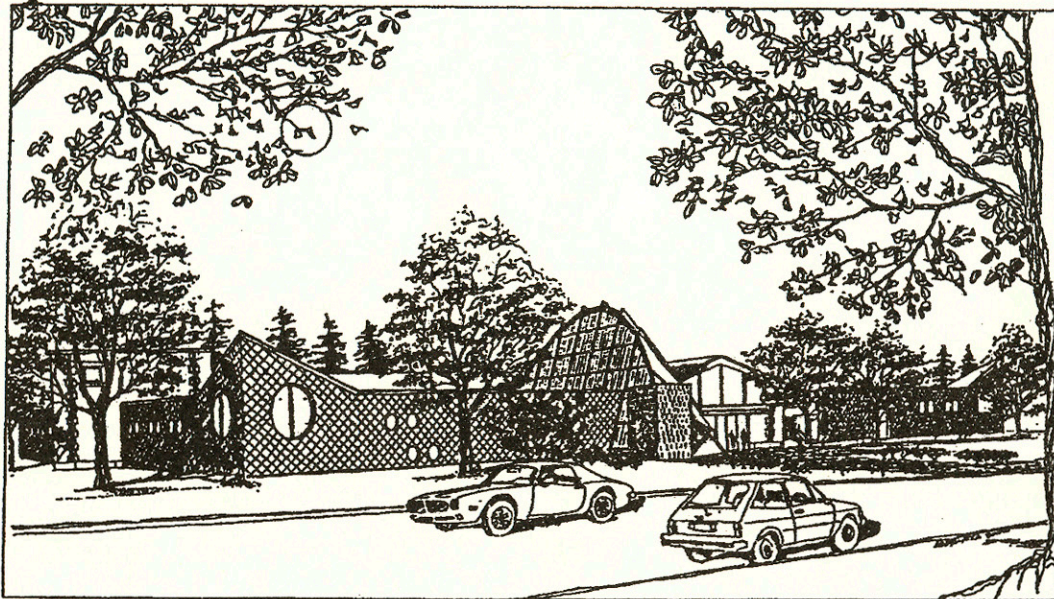
Family Place, a project that was developed at the Middle Country Library in Centereach, is aimed at infants and toddlers and their parents. It offers a variety of programs within a space resembling an early childhood learning center that includes resource materials and lounge chairs for parents. The special area is usually within a library's children's section, which traditionally had been reserved for school-age students.

At the Mastic-Moriches-Shirley Community Library, a pilot program involving a five-week Family Place parent-child workshop was such a success that a major construction project was undertaken five years ago that more than doubled the library's children's section.

"The parents wanted more, not just the five-week program," said Kathleen Deerr, the head of children's and parent's services. "The fact that we were able to prove that the types of space and programs typical of Family Place were significant helped us to pass a \$4 million bond for the renovation and new construction of the library."

"We told people, if we get a building we will be able to do this. And then we saw all those mothers with the strollers coming to vote."

The Shirley-based library is one of 23 Nassau and Suffolk public libraries that in April were officially designated members of a new network, Family Place Long Island. Among the criteria for eligibility are the development of space for the program and a librarian's completion of a training course. The network is under the umbrella of LI-



The Family Place area will be at the corner of the Middle Country Library with the round windows.

libraries for the Future, a national nonprofit library advocacy group that will help participants to seek grant money.

A major expansion is currently occurring at the Middle Country Library, which serves 60,000 people. The \$14 million project will expand its two buildings, with \$2 million going to the Family Place area. The Middle Country Library Foundation donated \$200,000 for the area's interior, according to Sandra Feinberg, the library director and a founder of Family Place.

**T**HE 29-year-old main building on 5.5 acres in Centereach will increase to 77,000 square feet from 52,000 and is expected to be completed by December. The children's section will expand to 16,000 square feet from 12,000 and will include a children's museum, a young teen section and a 5,000-square-foot Family Place section, which will be named for its major benefactors, Horace and Amy Hagedorn of Sand's Point, who donated \$100,000.

A branch building on 2.9 acres in Selden will expand to 30,000 square feet from 15,000 and will open in July. The children's section

will increase to 4,000 square feet from 400. The second floor is being renovated as a Family Place librarian training center, and two rooms on the first floor will house the Family Place area, which is being named by the Rauch Foundation of Garden City, which donated \$50,000.

Middle Country's new look will be "different and dynamic, to show it's a special place," Ms. Feinberg said. The architect is Hardy Holzman Pfeiffer Associates of New York City, which renovated Radio City Music Hall and the Majestic and Victory theaters in Manhattan.

Robert T. Almodovar, the project designer and senior associate manager, said, "The key in designing the children's area is to highlight certain objects in the room that would define certain areas," adding, "Family Place is defined by its location and its furniture."

A colorful 120-foot-long hallway, to the immediate left of the reception desk in the children's center, will lead to the L-shaped Family Place wing. Its soaring, pitched roof with two large circular picture windows, 7 feet in diameter, highlight the corner to

"define the special place in the children's space," Mr. Almodovar said.

A series of smaller circular windows, 4 feet in diameter, are located along the wall of the main children's section 8 feet above the ground for natural lighting, but in the Family Place area there are also two that are 3 feet above ground for curious eyes.

The interiors of the entire children's sections of both the Selden and Centereach buildings include natural wood walls with orange highlights and exposed bright yellow ductwork.

**T**HE exterior of the buildings have been treated with a variety of materials, including translucent window walls and clay tile blocks, that are used to make the transition between the additions and the existing brick buildings, Mr. Almodovar said. The Centereach building, which has a 25-foot high arched window-wall in its copper-roofed lobby, also has silver-toned metal shingles, interspersed with copper, that create a diamond pattern.

The children's section is important in the "big growth" of the Middle Country School

District, according to the superintendent, Connie Lothridge. A demographic study done two years ago showed enrollment would increase by 1,000 over the next five years, and "that's on target," she said. Since June 2000 enrollment has increased to 10,916 from 10,632.

According to Ms. Deerr, the Mastic-Moriches-Shirley Community Library has added a second level, expanding to 46,000 square feet from 20,000. The children's room was increased to more than 7,000 square feet from 2,700, with about 20 percent allotted to a two-level Family Place center.

The center includes a bathroom with low fixtures, carpeted steps around a shallow circular pit for shows and reading time, three wide but shallow steps between the levels for toddlers to "practice walking up and down," and "lots of windows and comfortable lounge chairs," Ms. Deerr said. The shelves are low and the walls are carpeted to absorb sound and to cushion the possible impact of a running child. Vertical posts on the open second-level railing are 2½ inches apart, as prescribed in safety regulations for cribs.

The library serves 55,000 people and the number of "very young people is increasing dramatically," Ms. Deerr said.

Nancy Curtin, director of the Port Washington Library, which serves 30,000 people and recently underwent a \$6 million expansion said, "The Port Washington people are 'so proud of their library' that real estate agents bring them for a walk-through."

Dorothy Waxman, a broker at Laffey Associates Fine Homes and Estates in Port Washington, said: "I always send people to our library; it's exceptional. It's representative of our community and what they want. And, there is a tremendous influx of families with young children."

The library project, designed by Donald and Lissa Sciare Architects of Port Washington, increased the 30-year-old building to 48,000 square feet from 36,000. The new Family Place center occupies about 5,000 square feet, Ms. Curtin said.

The Port Washington Library Foundation has donated \$60,000 for interior features like three new "Wonder Walls" that include mazes and movable toys for children ages 1 to 3 to walk up to, she said.

Others that have either completed or are undergoing construction to expand their Family Place areas are the Amagansett, Great Neck, Half Hollow Hills, Harborfields, Long Beach, Northport/East Northport, Patchogue-Medford and South Huntington libraries. ■