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Lafayette's Fountain of Youth

By Lou Fancher



Chaya Tong, a 1st grader at Springhill Elementary School, selects a book with Librarian Susan Weaver. Tong was the winner in the K-2 age group of the Why Libraries? essay contest. The other essay contest winners were: Viola Zhao, 3rd grade, Lafayette Elementary School; Dana Zhu, 6th grade, Stanley Middle School; and Tyler Supple, 9th grade, Acalanes High School Photo Andy Scheck

traveled over the Bay Bridge to see Brian Goggin's sculpture: "I didn't think it would be a giant pile of papers!" he says. Behind the surprise in his voice is a young mind expanding: Exactly what libraries are meant to inspire. The Pinder family was nestled in a reading nook. "It's easy to find the books," Alex, age 10, says immediately. Happy to have a copy of Twilight- "There are only two and I got one of them!" he whispers- he and younger sister Kathleen are satisfied. "And every day, more and more people will come," Kathleen adds with delight. In the teen room, Isabella von Ebbe, a seventh grader at Stanley Middle School, carries an armful of books. "There's so much for different ages," she says. Von Ebbe babysat and donated her earnings to the new library. Why? "Because it's cool that I somewhat helped build this library!" she answers. For the youngest readers, Children's Librarian Donna Lenhard is the clearest drawing card. Bay Area Parent Magazine named her "Best of the Best" Children's Librarians in 2008. "Kids are mesmerized and parents are entertained," Weaver says of Lenhard's storytelling hours. Miss Donna's well-attended sessions will follow a daily schedule, and "pajamarama," held one evening per month, will augment the daytime reading events. The library is also collaborating with The Storyteller bookstore on author visits. The combined forces are certain to attract local and national young adult and children's book authors. Down in the Arts and Science Discovery center, the Chabot Space and Science Center and the Lawrence Hall of Science will present special programs for kids. Summer camps involving consortium partners will fill the community hall and various meeting rooms. The new library's increased footprint, allowing expanded youth programming, leaves a deep, lasting impression. It's true, if hyperbolic, to think that Lamorinda's "fountain of youth" now runneth over.

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Recent media coverage of the new Lafayette Library and Learning Center has been extensive, but even so, you could have missed the best news of all. Yes, there's public art, a technology lab, green features like motion sensitive lighting and solar panels, plus oodles of space for curling up with your favorite novel, but the star of the new facility is its mindset. Behind every design decision, every program, every book on the shelves, is a determination to create a fountain of youth, offering Lamorinda an intoxicating elixir of discovery and learning.

Senior Community Library Manager Susan Weaver was beaming during a recent tour and discussion about the youth programs. Every Lafayette elementary class has signed up for a visit. The library received over 500 entries to the Power of Youth writing competition, and thousands were expected on opening day.

Much of the excitement, and a good portion of the funding, stems from the exuberant origins of the new facility. With kids in mind, there's a teen area, a tutoring room, outside decks, a storytelling circle, and more. For every great idea about youth programming, Weaver has the same delighted response: "Now, we have the space to do that."

Even for children beyond Lamorinda's parameters, there's a plan: video-conferencing equipment will eventually reach kids at a distance. "We're committed to outreach for the underserved," Weaver says. "Everyone should have access to information."

The public opening on November 14th affirmed Weaver's mission statement, with kids traveling from San Francisco, Oakland, and cities east of Lafayette to visit. Zachary Hoffman, age 11, described by his dad as a "book hound," gave the new facility his approval. He

Reach the reporter at: info@lamorindaweekly.com

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