

Community 10 Year Vision

San Rafael Public Library

Everyone in town is talking about the recently opened San Rafael Public Library and I can't wait to get there.

From home, I pull up the website on my mobile device and see that the library is open well into the evening. The website prompts me with various modes of transportation to the library and I decided to ride my bike. It's fantastic that library services are easily accessible to all San Rafael neighborhoods.

I've seen pictures of the new library in local media stories, but nothing could have prepared me for seeing it in person for the first time. It's truly an architectural marvel and I remember that the library is certified at the highest level of ecological sustainability and energy efficiency. I'm proud of my community for contributing to the health of our planet. I observe a group of tourists admiring the beautiful architecture and green features of the library and I remind myself to bring my next out-of-town visitors here too.

Outside the library, I see people arriving by all modes of transportation and I park my bike in a covered, secured spot. I also notice the large parking structure and many disabled parking spaces close to the library's entrance. As I walk in the front door, a librarian with a smile immediately greets me. You can tell that people love working here. I see a group of school-aged children working with teachers and parents in the library's expansive outdoor space. Much like the children, I am filled with excitement and curiosity when I see the library's interior. There are stunning views from nearly all vantage points in the library. I notice peaceful spaces for people to read and relax. Even though there are tons of people in the library, it doesn't feel crowded.

I walk through the bright, open atrium and spend a moment admiring one of the rotating installations from a local artist-in-residence. I also spot the library's artist-in-residence standing by her installation and teaching kids about watercolors. Natural materials permeate the space—stone, wood, and metal. I can tell where I'm going as soon as I walk in thanks to clear, color-coded signs. A series of interactive displays at the entrance shows me everything that is going on at the library today and also lets me find what I'm looking for quickly. I also note the locations of the family-friendly restrooms throughout the building.

I continue into a spacious reading room with comfortable chairs and gorgeous artwork. The reading room offers beautiful lighting and floor-to-ceiling windows, just like in the original Carnegie library. All around the reading room, I am surrounded by shelves of books and more comfortable seating in between the stacks. The quiet in this area makes it obvious that people are lost in stories or hard at work studying. I also spot large collections of movies, music, and more--all within reach. The library provides collections in the languages of our community and the collection reflects the diversity of our community's interests.

I walk to the other side of the reading room and discover my new favorite place in the library-- the special collections room. Lined with historical volumes, this feels like the heart of the building and radiates a sense of local history, culture, and a feeling of peace.

All this peace and quiet makes me want to find someplace a little noisier! I consult the nearby directional display and head toward the expansive youth area. I immediately notice a group of children happily playing dress-up. Another group of kids is putting on an impromptu puppet show and gets a round of applause from their audience of grandparents. On the other side of that adorable performance is a group of toddlers playing. A mother remarks to me that she saw a group of teens studying in that same area yesterday. There are lots of bean bag chairs and a cushioned floor with several kids stretched out and reading books. Middle schoolers are creating and rearranging art on the wall.

I'm impressed that there are so many community rooms in our library. I notice a tutor helping a young child with math in one room, a Chamber of Commerce meeting in another, a citizenship class being taught in Spanish in another, and yet another room hosts a group of seniors playing Mahjong and eating lunch together.

The state-of-the-art multimedia lab across the hall is bustling with people of all ages. I'm impressed with the variety of sleek technology I see and the feeling of coziness despite the expansive facility. There is fluidity between the indoor and outdoor spaces that makes this library something special. The library even offers its beautiful spaces for special events and workshops after hours.

My next destination is the help desk to learn more about how I can check out library materials on my new mobile device. The easily-identifiable staff member is welcoming and knowledgeable. He quickly shows me the basics of my device and how to browse the library's large collection of digital resources and check them out to my device. He also points out a list of upcoming technology trainings and workshops. While we chat, I charge my device at the convenient charging station.

All this learning has made me hungry and thirsty, so I decide to get a snack at the new pop-up food vendor in the library's outdoor space. I think it's great that the library has carved out a place for local restaurants to showcase themselves and feed hungry library customers like me. On the way down I run into a friend. She mentions her recent trip to Mexico and tells me about the language classes at the library in partnership with Dominican University. She excitedly mentions the new Spanish language conversation club meet-ups every week in the library. We bid each other goodbye as she rushes off to a meeting in one of the library's community rooms.

I continue downstairs and pass by an eye-catching display of paperback mystery books, and decide to take one home. Turning around I see a display on space travel and notice that the latest book of NASA deep space photographs has been released and there's a copy available, so I grab that too! Score! On my way out I pass by a person carrying what looks like a large electric drill and shovel and ask her about them. She tells me that she has just checked them out from the library's tool collection, and I marvel at the idea of not having to buy a tool for every little home improvement project if I can just check them out from the library! I finally make it outside and buy my snack.

I walk back inside and spot a large sign hanging from the ceiling that says "Check out here!" and head that way with my books. I pass by a wall in the atrium that looks like another beautiful art installation, but notice that it has the names of generous donors to the library worked into the design. I learn from the accompanying plaque that the library has a donor campaign that has continued its momentum even after the new library was built. The library is well-supported by the entire community and gets its funding from a combination of the City's general fund, the special library parcel tax, donations, the Friends of the Library, and the Library Foundation. The Foundation is also building an endowment fund for the library's ongoing and future needs. The entire community feels ownership of our library.

When I'm ready to check out my books I make my way to the self-service checkout station. A library employee approaches me to ask if I'd like to learn more about the new checkout stations, and I take the opportunity to ask about whether or not I need a new library card. Thankfully I don't, and after a short lesson I find that checking out is a breeze and the system even presents me with an opportunity to make a donation to the library, which I'm happy to do.

Behind the checkout stations I notice librarians, other staff, and volunteers working in a spacious workroom. Throughout this visit I've been really impressed with the people who work here. They are approachable, well-trained, and I like that they reflect the diversity of my community. It makes me feel welcome and comfortable and I especially like that they always know what is available in the library and throughout the community.

My visit is drawing to a close and I realize that visiting the library has been the highlight of my day. I'm able to find things I didn't even know I wanted. There's truly something at the library for everyone in my family, separately and together. Our library is a fabulous community resource and I'm treated like I'm special here. I'm excited to come back and discover something new, again and again.