

## Reading Room Grows Up

By Anthony Hall

From a book box in blue jeans to a reading room in a red dress, the Lansing Community Library Center has expanded its quarters as a gift to the community, and all of it is paid for, down to the last paperback.

By any measure, the old red brick school building that was set for demolition, or at least on a long descent into decay, was given a new life when enterprising community members took it over three years ago with the thought that Lansing — with hardly a town center to its name — would support a rural reading room.

It would take donated books, volunteers as busy as honey bees and more than a few fundraisers to support the project, which would not be called a library, but could link itself to the Tompkins County Public Library as a satellite reading room. Saturday morning kids' events, with grannies reading to toddlers, and class tours by the elementary school helped breathe life into the enterprise.

But in some minds, it wasn't quite a done deal. A reading room is great; a

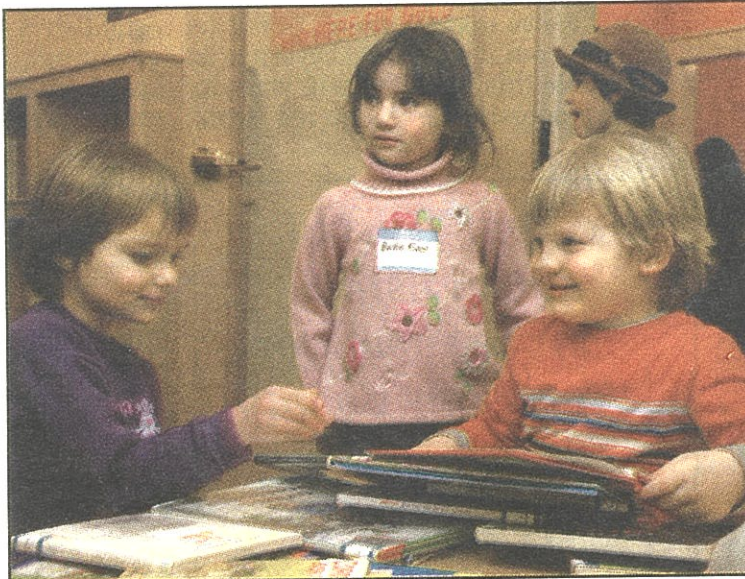


Photo by Kathy Morris

**Fiona Lory-Moran (left), Bridie Alano (center) and Ryan Camp made a beeline for the books piled on the table in the Children's Room of the newly renovated Lansing Community Library Center. The children were among the many community members who showed up on Feb. 28 to help celebrate the LCLC's grand opening with tea and cookies, music and festive hats.**

library is even better. So the call for funds went out for an expansion project that would legitimize the commitment that will continue with a public referendum on May 15, which could turn the reading room into a de facto public library.

The fund drives started in 2005 and, as one of the center's board members says, "We hardly heard a 'no' at all." Two years and \$400,000

later, the paint was drying on a 2,000-square-foot expansion that almost doubled the size of the old building to 4,500 square feet. The split-level structure had a path put in for wheelchair access and a lift was installed. A children's reading room, complete with a few "honey-I shrunk-the-furniture" items and a full-sized rocking chair, was added. The cramped second

floor that held bookshelves, a checkout station and kids' corner is now a spacious room for book browsing with wide aisles.

The downstairs area now includes a study room, a boardroom, a room for periodicals and a room to process incoming books. It also has a large all-purpose "art room" available for readings by visiting authors, poster projects, puppet shows, skits, or "anything to make it more exciting and bring more people to the library," says art committee chair Janice Hagstrom.

The room currently contains a hat and photography display, provided in part by town historian Louise Bement, and for last week's open house it was filled with lively lawn party music provided by high school freshman Benjamin Hummel and his mother, Carrie Reuning-Hummel, on violins.

The event was a many-hats-tipped salute to Lewis Carroll. Billed as a "Mad Hatter's Tea Party," the event included dozens of guests (all of them curiouser and curiouser, as

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SIMON WHEELER / Journal Staff

Volunteer Judy Scott gets ready to close the Lansing Community Library Center at noon on Wednesday. The Library is looking to change its status so it can levy a local tax, have a full time librarian and have more regular hours.

# Lansing library continues to evolve

## Proposition would create a new charter

By Jason Gabak

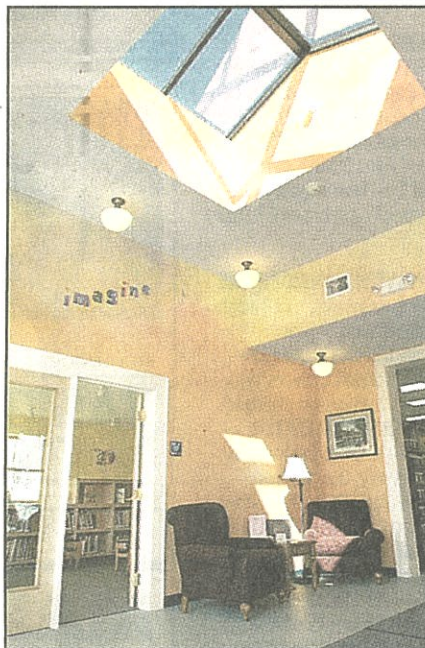
Special to The Journal

**LANSING** — Since the idea to create the Lansing Community Library Center first surfaced in 1999, a dedicated group of volunteers, have strived to make the library a center for reading, learning and culture within the community.

Now, the library and its volunteers are asking Lansing voters to help them take the next step in their evolution. Voting on a proposition to establish a new library charter will take place May 15. If adopted, the charter would permanently establish the library as a school district library.

Currently, the library is classified as a reading room of the Tompkins County Public Library.

"We have over 13,500 books, videos, DVD, talking books," said Marlaine Darfler, chairperson for the Friends of the Lansing Community Library Center. "We have tried to create a place that allows equal access to all of this to everybody and make the library a place where people can meet and talk. You can go in and see a younger person talking to an older person about the book they are reading."



SIMON WHEELER / Journal Staff

The lobby of the redesigned Lansing Community Library Center was added in when the building was enlarged in 2006.

Throughout its years of operation, the library has functioned through fundraising and the dedicated work of volunteers.

"We have 50 or 60 volunteers," Darfler said. "Through fundraisers we have been able to raise enough money for operating costs and to pay for our recent renovations, which include a research room and community meeting room. One of our goals has been to make the library like a town square, a place where people can meet and talk. We want this to be a place that can serve many purposes."

In addition to the charter, the library is asking for the foundation of a nine-person board of trustees, who will be empowered to annually raise \$108,310 for the support and operating costs of the library. An assessment of 17 cents per \$1,000 in assessed value, or \$17 on a \$100,000 assessment, would be added to tax bills. That comes to \$25.50 on a \$150,000 assessment, \$38.25 on \$225,000, and \$63.75 on \$375,000, according to a brochure by the Friends of the Lansing Community Library Center.

The vote, which would establish the Lansing Library as an independent rural library, also calls for the hiring of a fulltime librarian to oversee library operations and growth.

"Right now we are all volunteers," Darfler said. "We would like to get someone to work fulltime to help oversee all the volunteers and help us keep the library growing, writing grants and things of that nature and also help us keep longer hours and be open more."



# Reading

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Carroll would have said) who marveled at the metamorphosis of the old building from a cramped, utilitarian space to a neonatal library that seems bright, playful and dignified.

A fresh coat of paint helps, especially in contrast to the darker wood paneling that had covered the walls. But the arts committee went a step further, using metallic paint on the top half of the walls to make them receptive to magnets.

The upstairs foyer is the master stroke. It takes a flight of stairs to enter the building, where the main entrance was flipped to face the parking lot. The stairs to the door "make it feel special," says Bert Fortner, who helped architect Ernie Bayles with the building's design.

Beyond that, visitors walk into a foyer (painted with a bright and hazy faux-finish technique by Andrea Staffeld) where the ceiling extends to a handsome new skylight which faces a large triangular façade above an open double door, leading to the bookshelves. On the right is the counter and a collection of Matt Christopher's many sports books donated by his family. On the left, the new children's room is sequestered behind glass doors.

It is a space that makes visitors stop and think. It gives pause and purpose, almost like the foyer to a church, but with an open look at all those books. You want to duck inside and catch up with all those authors you might have missed.

"Lansing likes to read. It isn't a lost art," said reading room board member Hollie Hardy. Both young and the old are in that group. "I

waited all summer for this to open up again," says frequent patron Chris Robinson, 8, who attended the open house with four of his five siblings and his mother, Denise Robinson.

Shirley Graves, who lives at the neighboring Woodsedge senior citizens' housing project, is also a dedicated visitor. "I think it's gorgeous. I think it's wonderful," she says.

Tompkins Weekly

March 5-11, 2007