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Novi's new library rewrites the book on cost-saving

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Just when many libraries are cutting staff and hours, Novi plans a grand opening June 26 for a new library that's double the size of the old one.

The Novi library was designed to showcase visual art, welcome community gatherings and provide literature, videos and 107 computers -- there were just 42 before -- for Novi's residents, estimated to number nearly 51,000 by the Southeast Michigan Council of Governments in December.

• PHOTOS:Novi's New Library

Walls display more than 1,600 locally made tiles depicting literary characters and scenes from history, all donated by the artist, Connie Lunski, a Novi resident.

The Read-A-Latte Café lets patrons do what once was verboten in most libraries -- snack.

"It's absolutely gorgeous," library regular M.J. Pine, 59, said last week, shortly after the library's June 1 opening.

Novi Mayor David Landry said the city "came in on time and under our budget" by an estimated \$700,000-\$800,000 for the project's \$12.5-million original estimated cost.

When Novi residents Charles and Myrtle Walker pledged a \$1-million donation in 2004, "that kick-started our capital campaign" and led to voters passing a bond in 2007 to complete the funding, Landry said.

But while Novi welcomes a new library, other municipalities have cut back.

The Troy Public Library is slated for closure by July 1, 2011. Ecorse and River Rouge now have one director, as the Ecorse library reduced its hours to three days a week.

The Lincoln Park library has cut back on book buying and programs. The Rochester Hills Public Library also has reduced book buying and may have to cut hours in 2012, director Christine Lind Hage said.

Novi's new library is "a beacon of hope for what a community can do, even in very tough times," said executive director Jim Pletz of the Library Network in Southgate.

Books have digital chips to let patrons do their own checkout at six scanning stations.

That, along with a labor-saving automated return system inspired by auto assembly lines, let the expanded library keep the same staff level of about 50 -- a crucial savings because a library's greatest cost, once built, is salaries, director Julie Farkas said.

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