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Westerly Public Library Reopens

With Renovations Complete, The Westerly Public Library Opened Not With A Bang But With A Whisper

By Bree Shirvell | [Email the author](#) | January 4, 2011

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It was fitting for the [Westerly Public Library](#) to quietly reopen Monday morning, after all, libraries are supposed to be quiet. After being closed for three weeks during a major renovation, the Westerly Public Library simply opened its doors Monday morning as if it were any ordinary day.

Some of the librarians whispered they weren't sure if people knew they were open, but as the morning wore on the library began to get busier. It'll get even busier once Stonington and Westerly residents realize that not only is the library reopen, but it's been transformed into a bright, open, inviting space that pays homage to its past while firmly taking a step into the future.

Technology abounds, with a heated ramp out front, wireless Internet access throughout, additional Internet computer stations—one on all three floors—a self-service hold program, and self check-out stations that are sure to cut down time waiting in line.

The \$8 million renovation of the library began in September 2009. While the library has the same footprint as it did prior to the renovations, not much else has stayed the same.

New paint, new furniture, and reconfigured spaces are just a few of the many changes the library underwent. The children's floor is now on the lower level, where it will have access to the story garden outside in Wilcox Park when the construction on that is finished sometime in spring.

A homework center on the second floor for young adults is awaiting computers, but for now the floor offers views of the park, three quiet study rooms, and the gallery and special collections sections will reopen soon.

"The young adult section offers one of the best views of the park," Reference Librarian Nina Wright said.

On the first floor, an information kiosk sits between the two entrances. Throughout are tables, benches, and over-sized reading chairs, offering places to study, read, or people-watch through the many windows overlooking the park and downtown Westerly.

Built in 1894, the library saw three additions, but this renovation was about preserving the old. The Old Main Reading room was restored with replicas of the original chandlers created, and an original table from 1895 restored and placed in the center of the room.

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"The Old Reading room was always beautiful, but now it's stunning," Wright said.

One of the discoveries of the renovations was the original hardwood floor on the stairs and landing near the second floor meeting room. The carpet was torn up with the intention of replacing it, but when they saw what was underneath the carpet, Library Director Kathryn Taylor and the renovation team decided to leave the floors uncovered.

With the major renovations complete, the library is still putting the finishing touches on some areas, working out some of the kinks, and continuing to step firmly into the future with a possible program on eBooks coming to the library. Patrons can already use the library catalog to rent eBooks, but expanding and holding lectures on the program, possibly in conjunction with Barnes and Noble, is something the library is looking into to.

Library cards to the Westerly Library are free to all Rhode Island and Stonington residents. Other area residents can pay a yearly fee of \$25 for a library card, and teachers who live and/or teach in Westerly or Stonington are eligible for a free card.

Do you use the Westerly Library? [Tell us in the comments.](#)

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