

⚡ SEVERE THUNDERSTORM WATCH IN EFFECT

# Calling all readers: St. Vital Library reopens

## FROM THREATS OF DEMOLITION TO \$2.4-MILLION RENOVATION

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Posted: **05/28/2018 5:31 PM** | Last Modified: 05/29/2018 9:36 AM



MAGGIE MACINTOSH / WINNIPEG FREE PRESS

Coun. Brian Mayes (left), seen with Mayor Brian Bowman at the St. Vital Library reopening on Monday, said his favourite part of the library's renovation is the new elevator.

The St. Vital Library, which was slated for demolition five years ago, reopened Monday after extensive renovations aimed to modernize it and improve accessibility.

Around 60 community members, including a handful of Grade 4 and Grade 5 students from St. George School and a Grade 10 band class from Glenlawn Collegiate, celebrated the reopening with a ribbon-cutting ceremony.

"My message to you is simple: welcome back home," said Mayor Brian Bowman, who was joined by Councillors Mike Pagtakhan and Brian Mayes.

The \$2.4-million renovation included adding more washrooms and an indoor family literacy playground. An elevator was installed in 2015 in the first phase.

The second phase, which included everything from putting in a new roof to adding a tutorial room, required the library to close for 16 months.

The library opened on April 1, 1963. It is the first modernist building in Winnipeg to receive a historical structure designation, although that wasn't the case before Mayes was elected in 2011.

"There was a push when I was first elected to close this facility," he said Monday.

But looking back on his trips to the St. Vital Library at age eight, Mayes decided to fight to keep the doors open instead of going along with the city's plans to amalgamate the St. Vital and Windsor Park libraries. Mayes helped get the building heritage status in 2014.

He said his favourite part of the renovated library is the elevator, which wasn't in the original plans.

"A woman in the Windsor community came to me with a disabled son and said, 'You're not doing that without putting in an elevator'— and she was right. I'm very proud we got the additional funding. It would've been awkward and still not modernized without an elevator," Mayes said.

The renovations are part of Winnipeg's 2013 library redevelopment strategy. Ed Cuddy, the manager of Winnipeg's Library Services, said the redevelopment plan now involves 10 libraries.

Cuddy said the city is nearly halfway through the project. So far, it's completed



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St. Vital resident Bonnie Makodanski took a portion of the ribbon that was cut at the ceremony as a souvenir.

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renovations to libraries in Charleswood, Windsor Park and St. Vital.

"It's always a great feeling to finish a project and make it available to the public and just see the reaction," Cuddy said.

"Every time we renovate, usage increases significantly; I think it becomes a bit more of a destination because of the new services we're able to provide."

The St. Vital Library offers more than 233 programs annually and circulates approximately 180,000 items.

After months of visiting surrounding libraries while she waited for the renovations to finish, St. Vital resident Bonnie Makodanski stopped by to attend the ceremony, use a public computer and scan the shelves Monday morning.

"I was so happy to hear that this one was not going to be destroyed because it's my second home," said the retired Winnipegger, who lives about 10 blocks from the Fermor Avenue library.

Makodanski said the new furniture, design and colours are sleek and yet the building's character remains the same.

The core of the building still reminds her of her childhood, when she used to visit the library and read to her sisters.

She took a piece of the blue ribbon that Bowman, Mayes and others helped cut to celebrate the reopening, and she plans to share it.

"I'm going to cut a little piece of this ribbon off and send it to Australia because my youngest sister lives there now with her three little ones, and she always came to this library," she said.

The library's summer hours are Monday, Tuesday and Thursday from 10 a.m. to 8:30 p.m. and Wednesday and Friday from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. St. Vital Library is closed on weekends from Victoria Day to Labour Day.

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## HISTORY

Updated on Tuesday, May 29, 2018 at 9:36 AM CDT: Corrects email address

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