

Let the Sun Shine In

Jenkins Law Library now a destination, not a book warehouse

by Regina Smith

The Jenkins Law Library in Philadelphia is America's first law library, but it does not have a permanent home. As a result, the library has moved seven times in its 203-year history. For the past 35 years it has occupied space in office buildings. When the library's lease recently expired, it offered the opportunity to renovate Jenkins' library space into a destination.

Two years prior to the expiration of our lease, the library engaged an outside consultant to conduct focus groups among the library's various users and staff to find out what they liked and disliked about the existing facility and what they would like to see in a newly renovated facility. This proved to be a valuable tool for two reasons: it confirmed ideas that our staff thought would improve the library, and it gave those who participated in the focus groups a sense that they had input into their new library.

We then began working with our architects and designers. They conducted programming exercises with the staff and began the planning. The office leasing market in a large city is competitive, and we engaged a real estate leasing company to investigate prospective spaces. Six spaces indicated an interest, and our current landlord came back with the best offer. The landlord even included a generous renovation allowance to update the library as part of the deal. This was an opportunity for Jenkins to reconfigure its space to accommodate the wishes of the focus groups and what we believe 21st century libraries should be.

The architectural team began incorporating our ideas into a floor plan, and during a period of a few months we created our ideal plan, taking into account our renovation allowance. Initial bids came back from contractors, ranging from \$700,000 to \$900,000 more than our allowance. We went back to the drawing board, eliminated extras, and went out for a second round of bids that ranged from \$180,000 to \$450,000 more than the allowance. We felt comfortable selecting the lowest bidder; it was the company that built our space 20 years ago.

Jenkins' original space aged well. After the renovation was complete, two of the library's stack areas remained in their original places. The remaining areas were reconfigured to incorporate what we believe our visitors want when they come to Jenkins and what we need to fulfill our mission. They include a large reading room with comfortable furnishings, easily accessible stack areas for a growing collection, and a place to store prior editions of treatises that the practicing bar rely on us to maintain. We now

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have a conference center consisting of a multipurpose room in which to hold classes, social functions, and author talks; a computer learning center with 20 terminals for hands-on instruction; a large and small conference room for break-out groups or for rental; and a café that is a gathering place for our visitors. We envision our library as a destination rather than a place that is strictly a research facility or a book warehouse.

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Opposite the front desk are portraits of the library's benefactors, Mr. and Mrs. Jenkins. Between them one gets a glimpse of the newest and most appreciated amenity—the Jenkins Café.

Deal Breakers

One of our requirements was to have a reading room that incorporated a reference desk, computer hexes, an area where we could begin library tours, and a comfortable seating area. Most importantly, we wanted light to stream through the room. This was accomplished by raising the ceiling in the main reading room to 12 feet. One wall serves as a gallery for some of the library's portraits, and a comfortable reading area adjoins a built-in bookcase that houses leisure reading.

We wanted the staff to be as close together as possible, because they have been working in teams for the past 10 years. The library's presence on the Web is very important, as are the indexing and online database projects that are part of what we offer our members. Almost every staff person is involved in these projects. We reconfigured the information technology and technical services areas, as well as the Web department, and moved the collections

department so that they are all located in one area. Managers occupy offices, and remaining staff occupy cubicles. Tables for impromptu meetings are scattered throughout this area. Natural light in staff work areas was also a requirement. Staff is located near windows so that even the ones who are in the rear of this space see natural light.

We eliminated two stack areas, the area where we kept our treatises, and our closed stacks. We merged the treatises with our reporters and weeded the collection. This section is now in LC call number order with periodicals at the end of the section. The state materials remain in their original area. We installed compact shelving to house our closed stacks in the rear of the technical services area and leased an additional 1,700 square feet of space in a storage area in our building for which we pay a substantially reduced rental rate. This reallocation of space made our new conference center possible.

Compromises

Unfortunately, the reference and document delivery departments remain in the interior. But now that the reference desk is located in the reading room, staff is able to readily access natural light. The same is true for the circulation, membership, and outreach departments. They are all adjacent to the newly reconfigured reading room. An etched glass divider separates circulation from the main reading room, which allows light to flow through to the library's entryway. It also enables librarians at the reference desk to observe what is happening at circulation in case it becomes busy or there is a problem.

Instead of a separate entrance and exit, we now have one set of glass doors and panels. Opposite the front desk are the portraits of our benefactors, Mr. and Mrs. Jenkins, and between them one gets a glimpse of our newest and most appreciated amenity—the Jenkins Café.

Since we have opened the entire space to visitors, we have received wonderful feedback. The café has become a huge hit, and visitors are delighted that they now have a place to plug in their computers, no matter which carrel or table they are using. They also like the fact that they know what the weather is when they leave, since they now have a view. ■

Regina Smith (rsmith@jenkinslaw.org) is director of the Jenkins Law Library in Philadelphia. This recent renovation is the product of Jenkins' entire staff, who endured lots of noise, dust, and disruption for six months.