

**Dean Smith , Director of the Albuquerque and Bernalillo County Public Libraries**

**Remarks given July 9, 2022, at the Opening of the International District Library**

**Why build this International District Library?** Public libraries create opportunities for learning, they support literacy and education, they nurture ideas critical to a creative society, and they foster community.

**Libraries are a crucial part of our education system,** providing books, internet access, printing, online services and databases, educational and literacy programs, and staff to guide you in researching and finding information. With the increase of disinformation in today's world, a public libraries' programs, staff, and open access to information are more critical than ever.

**Libraries also play a significant role in financially strengthening their communities.** Several studies have found the return on Investment in public libraries to be 5 to 1—that means that for every \$1 invested in a library, \$5 returns to the community. That \$5 return is in the form of higher literacy rates, better educational outcomes, and increased employment and income.

**Thank you to all the taxpayers who are the source of the City, State and County funds that paid for the construction of this building.**

- And an enormous thank you to **Rey Garduño**, who, when he was Councilor for District 6, earmarked the bulk of the initial funding used to purchase the land, complete the design and start construction of this library.
- Thanks to **Jim Collie**, who, as a County Commissioner, secured over a half million in County bonds for the project and
- To a former State Senator for District 17, **Tim Keller**, who in the 2013 Legislative session appropriated over a half million in State Capital Outlay—the first funding to be earmarked for this project.

**And many thanks to the private donors whose funding supported enhancements that we could not otherwise have provided.**

- The **Albuquerque Community Foundation** provided a generous grant for not one, but two cutting-edge Virtual Reality computer systems that will be used for programming for all ages. (Today, you can test drive one of the virtual reality systems in the Young Adult Room.)
- The **Albuquerque Public Library Foundation** contributed over \$200,000 for enhancements to the Children's room, including the Early Literacy Center, and most recently very generous amount to be used for a major public art piece coming in a year or so.

- Representing the Library Foundation today is **Diane Fleming**. **Diane also chose to commit to this building the many generous donations from friends and family given in memory of her husband, Robert Fleming.**
- And I have tremendous gratitude for **Richard Freedman**, a man I never met—no library staff knew him, despite his being an avid user of the Public Library. **Richard left his entire estate to the library to “purchase books of general interest to the public” and to create “reading rooms.”** Over one million dollars from the resulting Freedman Trust is invested in this building alone.

So we have the **Freedman Reading Room**, the **Freedman Fireplace & Reading Lounge**, and the **Freedman Young Adult Room**. I have to recognize **Tom Walker** for making the Freedman Trust work. Tom has been the executor of the Freedman estate and is the Chair of the Freedman Trust Board. His excellent stewardship of this incredible philanthropic gift assures that the Freedman Trust will have an impact for generations of Library users.

**One of the most valuable things libraries contribute to their communities is space—a safe space to learn and connect for all members of the community.** Whoever you are and however you identify, you can come together with others every day in public libraries to learn, share, and celebrate where you live, who you are, and what you want to become.

**But all of these activities that go on in a public library are only possible because of the staff.** I’m going to ask them all to raise their hands, please hold your applause for a moment.

- First, there is **Steve Cordero and his Maintenance Team**—raise your hands and keep them up for a bit.
- **Oscar Montiel and his Information Technology team.**
- **Florence Sablan, the manager of this new building, and her team.** And all other Library Staff. Please join me in recognizing and thanking them.

**As Father Timothy Healy said, “the most important resource that the Library has goes home every night—the Library Staff.”**

It is said that the physical space of a library communicates much about our underlying values as a society. **This building communicates a lot about the values of the International District**—it says you are welcome here! It says Come in, learn, connect, enjoy, and be inspired! It welcomes and uplifts everyone who enters.

**Construction of this building would not have been possible without many people:**

- **Stacy Herrera** was the City Project Manager,
- **Maria Griego-Raby** and her team at Contract Associates selected and sourced the beautiful and striking furniture,

- **Nicole McKensie of Innovative Library Interiors** coordinated the shelving, and
- **RMKM architects Mark Rohde, Peter Rehn, and Antoni Baca, along with**
- **Landscape architects Faith Okuma and Abby Feldman from Surroundings Studio** turned the ideas of the community into the steel, glass, concrete, plants, brick pavers, and wood you see today.

**Mark Rohde, the principal architect, is the unstoppable force in making this building such a jewel in the City and a landmark of the International District.** He made sure it was what the community wanted. That process started with the three community 'Town Halls' that were held before design could begin. Mark and his team did tremendous preparation work before the Town Hall meetings to make sure they were well marketed, well attended, accessible to all, and that all community member voices were heard.

**Special thanks to the many community members who gave of their valuable time to come together and share their vision of what a public library for the International District should be.** Their input is what made this not just a good building but a building that is unquestionably a great public library.