

The New Lincoln Park Library Grand Opening
February 11, 1995
Allan Mellis - Chairman
Friends of the New Lincoln Park Library

Good Morning, Mayor Daley, Commissioner Dempsey, School Principals, Community Leaders and my neighbors. Over eight years ago, I had a dream - that Lincoln Park could have a library that would serve our children not only when they were in elementary school but all the way through high school. The inspiration for that dream were my sons Daniel and David (please stand). I didn't think it should be necessary for us to have to go to Sulzer Regional library every time a school report had to be written.

On your way in, you should have received a copy of an article reprinted from the LPCA Lincoln Parker publication that gives an account of the journey that led us to this glorious day. I would like to highlight some key points along that journey.

After almost a year of discussion with neighbors and community leaders about the need for a new library, an opportunity arose for us to make a case. Mayor Washington was going to have a community forum and I was invited to serve on the panel.

In order to let the administration, know we were serious, we decided that we had to put together a specific plan. My friend and architect Jerry Hamen lent his talents and he produced blueprints for a new Lincoln Park Library that incorporated a new entrance to the Fullerton elevated stop. We presented these plans to the mayor and his new Library Commissioner John Duff who didn't yet have a business card, so he wrote his phone number on his name plate from the forum (hold up).

The next eight years consisted of attending hundreds of meetings championing the need for our new library branch. The person who deserves a great deal of the credit is my wife Linda Mellis who supported my efforts. (please join me in giving her a round of applause). As every community leader knows, without the support of our spouses and families we could not possibly put in the time it takes to help improve our community.

One of the most significant events in our journey was the complete support we have received from DePaul University. In 1989, they formalized that commitment by putting support for the New Lincoln Park Library in their university master plan. I would like to especially thank DePaul's Executive Vice President Ken McHugh for his long-term support of this project. (Ken, please stand). Mayor Richard M. Daley has been extremely supportive of the private/public partnership we have established with DePaul in our quest for a new library.

We have had the complete support of our 43rd Ward Aldermen Marty Oberman, Edwin Eisendrath and Chuck Bernardini. Joe Cari, Chairman of the Chicago Public Library facilities committee was extremely helpful in assisting us in getting our plans approved by the Chicago Public Library (hold up photo with cake).

We had everything we needed at this point except the money. Two of our local elected officials State Senator John Cullerton and State

Representative Judy Erwin were the chief sponsors of the Secretary of State George Ryan's "Live and Learn" bill that provided funding for our new library (please join me in recognizing John and Judy and Secretary Ryan).

I would now like to talk about this magnificent space. A little less than a year ago, I was standing in this same spot looking at an entirely empty floor with concrete floors and concrete columns every twenty feet. It is a tribute to architects Joe Antunovich and Mike Vasilko (please stand) who designed our magnificent library. The completion of the building would not have been possible without DePaul Vice President Bob Janis who is in charge of the school's construction.

We have tried to design a library to take us into the 21st Century which is only five years in the future. Some highlights of our new library are:

1. The library is completely wired for a computer network with over 70 possible locations for personal computers connected to a central server. We have designed the network so that every computer can access every computer resource either inside or outside the building. There is a computer room for people to use to write reports and an online reference room. I would like to thank Jeff Price, our computer committee chairman and his committee for all their work.
2. This auditorium has state of the art audiovisual equipment and controls.
3. There is a separate pre-school room with appropriately sized furniture.
4. The washrooms are completely tiled and have changing tables in the women's and men's room.
5. There is a community bulletin board to post notices about neighborhood association meetings.
6. There is a parking lot for the library.

The library is for the enjoyment of our community. I ask that everyone take care of this jewel. If there are things that you like, let the library staff know. If there are things that you think can be improved let the library staff know. Please make a point of saying hello to the library staff today (they are wearing green badges). I would like to especially recognize Branch Manager Pat Gleason and Children's Librarian Scott Drawe for the thousands of hours they have put in on the design of the library, ordering of new materials and supervising the move-in. (please join me in giving them a round of applause).

Today we have all the principals of our local schools here at our grand opening (please stand). Already, they have met to put together a proposal for an Annenberg grant which will better link the schools and our libraries. I would like to thank Grant Pick for his efforts in forging a closer working relationship between the library and our local schools.

With the help of Dan Rostenkowski, we have applied for a grant from NASA to support our efforts to hook up to the information superhighway. We are now awaiting confirmation of the grant.

The bulk of the money we have raised so far has come from our local neighborhood associations. I would like to recognize Miriam Roberts, president of the Lincoln Park Conservation Association and the presidents of the seven affiliates. The Lincoln Park Chamber of Commerce has been an early and consistent supporter. I would also like to thank Citibank and Aetna Bank for their contributions.

Our work is not complete. We will continue to need volunteers to raise money, assist the staff, provide computer training. I would like to thank Brian Rankin, Marcie Johnson and Reven Fellars for their past and future efforts in fund raising. Please make sure you fill out a volunteer form before you leave.

Many neighbors have kidded me that the new Lincoln Park Library Branch should be named the Allan Mellis Memorial Library. I much prefer this alternative, which is to be here today to enjoy this momentous occasion. Thank you very much for coming.