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## New Howard library branch in Ellicott City nearing completion

### Original branch closes as staffers prepare for move to new building next door

By Edward Gunts, The Baltimore Sun

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When it opened in 1962, the Charles E. Miller branch was the flagship of Howard County's library system — the first and only permanent branch in the county

Nearly 50 years later, the Ellicott City location is once again leading a transition, as the library system replaces the original Miller branch with a \$29 million, state-of-the-art structure that will serve the county seat. It will be the largest of six library branches in the county.

Along with space to hold 58 percent more books and other materials, the new library will have features the others don't, including an "Enchanted Garden" for outdoor classes and activities focused on health, nutrition, gardening and the environment, and a large area containing the library, archives and offices of the Howard County Historical Society.

"We have outgrown the current building," said library spokeswoman Christie Lassen. "The population has grown. The current branch simply could not accommodate the needs of the community."

Howard County residents will have a chance to see all the new offerings for themselves when the Charles E. Miller Branch and Historical Center opens just west of the original building in the 9400 block of Frederick Road in Ellicott City.

Library officials are aiming to have a grand opening for the new building on or around Dec. 17. They say the exact date is contingent on the contractor finishing construction in time for the county to issue occupancy permits so staffers can complete their move. The teaching garden will open in the spring, and the old branch will be converted to administrative offices for the library system after the new building opens, freeing up space in the Central and East Columbia branches.

As a sign that the project is nearing completion, the library system permanently closed the original Miller branch as of Oct. 1 to prepare for the move.

Staffers are using the period between now and mid-December to sort through materials and pack up. They say they hope to have an occupancy permit by the end of October and to start moving shortly after. They also need time to install computers and other equipment that will be used by the staff and patrons.

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Howard County's library system was created in 1940 and operated out of a portable school building in Ellicott City, a bookmobile and rented quarters before opening the Miller branch in 1962. The replacement library was planned to serve residents of Ellicott City and surrounding areas, and construction began in February 2010.

Designed by Grimm + Parker Architects of Calverton, the new two-story branch will have 63,000 square feet of space, up from 23,500 square feet in the old building. It will contain 242,569 books and other materials. Besides printed books and magazines, there will be space for e-books, CDs, DVDs and other media.

There also will be a computer lab, study rooms, a children's classroom, a bank of meeting rooms that can be configured to accommodate groups from 10 to 300, and eco-friendly features such as a green roof. Oasis Design Group and Live Green Landscape Associates designed the teaching garden.

The new building will continue to bear the name of Charles E. Miller, who owned the property on which the original branch was constructed. Land for the replacement also was previously owned by the Miller family.

In light of the Oct. 1 closure, library officials suggest that patrons use other branches until the new Miller branch opens. In addition, the historical society announced that it will permanently close its existing library and archives at 8324 Court Ave. in Ellicott City effective Oct. 16 to prepare for its move into a 3,000-square-foot space on the new building's second level. The historical society's museum will remain open at the Court Avenue location.


Lauren McCormack, executive director of the historical society, said the old building is not fully accessible to people with disabilities and lacks adequate climate control systems for fragile materials. The society's collection includes books, photos, maps, drawings and other materials dating from before the settlement of what is now Howard County up to the present.

McCormack said the historical society's collection is extensively used, especially by students writing papers and researchers exploring family genealogies. She said she expects the collection will be used even more at the new location, where it will have increased visibility and parking will be easier.

"It gives us more space and it has a state-of-the-art [heating, ventilation and air conditioning] system, which is essential for the collection," she said. "We're very excited."

Once the new Miller branch opens and the old one is converted to offices, the library system's master plan recommends renovation of the Central and East Columbia branches, replacement of the aging Elkridge and Savage branches, and construction of a new south county branch, possibly at Maple Lawn or Waverly Woods.

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