

Newest library geared toward lifetime of learning



Artists Sue Palmer, left, and Sue Goforth work on a large mural Thursday afternoon in the children's section of the new Spout Springs Library. The newest library in the Hall County Library System is located on Spout Springs Road at Sterling on the Lake.

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By Jessica Jordan

jjordan@gainesvilletimes.com

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Doors to the new Spout Springs Library soon will open to reveal an imaginative world of princesses, frogs and castles for Hall County children.

Nestled on five acres at the entrance of the Sterling on the Lake subdivision in Flowery Branch, Hall County's sixth library location features a fairytale-themed section for kids, a neon-lit room for teens and a screened-in porch for quiet adult reading. The \$5.7 million facility will also have a coffee shop with a walk-up window and a large meeting room available for public use after-hours.

"We've put our emphasis in this library on service to families," said Adrian Mixson, director of the Hall County Library System.

The branch will have its grand opening celebration on May 24. Lt. Gov. Casey Cagle will speak at 1 p.m., and Rep. James Mills will attend the opening as well as Tom Oliver, chairman of the Hall County Board of Commissioners.

"The children's areas are pretty unique," Mixson said. "We have computers for kids who are 3 to 4 years old."

Colorful Little Tikes computers and Dr. Seuss books rest against a backdrop of fantasy at the new branch, where a group of 12 local artists, collectively called the Artisans of Flowery Branch, have worked for weeks on the details of a roughly 40-foot long mural that depicts magical characters surrounding a lake much like Lanier.

"It'll give you the feeling that you're looking out over the wall of a storybook castle into a storybook kingdom," Mixson said.

"I tried to superimpose fantasy on top of the landscape that's out there," said Sue Palmer, president of the Artisans of Flowery Branch. "The tree here was designed by Elaine Howard. She re-created it from a tree outside the library up the hill."

The knotty, old oak tree gracing the rolling library lawn may serve as not only a shady place for picnics and reading, but also as the branch's mascot.

The 23,500-square-foot facility will be among the county's largest libraries, and will have ample parking with 180 spaces for patrons.

Leslie James, director of the Spout Springs Library, said the new branch joins Blackshear Place as the second county library in South Hall.

"Knowing how busy Blackshear Place is, this place will be busy, too. The expectation is that this branch will have as much traffic as the downtown Gainesville branch. But we'll have adequate parking, which is a problem at the downtown branch," James said.

Mixson said the library is in the perfect spot, convenient to Flowery Branch and Oakwood residents, as well as to Jackson and Gwinnett counties.

"Over one-third of the county lives in the Flowery Branch area now, and they didn't have decent access to a library," Mixson said.

Mixson said Mills and the Hall County commission played active roles in funding construction of the library, with \$2 million of state funding and \$4 million provided by county sales taxes.

"So many times we have to put money into police or fire — things people need — but this is something people can really enjoy," Oliver said.

James said the new library aims to encourage life-long reading habits by accommodating readers of all ages.

In addition to a sunny, 40-seat story time room for puppet shows geared toward kindergartners, the library offers three private study rooms for students to work on homework or projects. Twenty-five computers fill two computer labs, one of which can be closed off for patrons to participate in library technology classes.

While children are engaged in pajama story time or puppet shows, parents can lounge in front of an electric stone fireplace or in the enclosed quiet adult reading room that has French doors leading to a screened-in porch. Readers are invited outdoors to overlook a lush lawn and sit in wicker furniture under ceiling fans and high arches.

The Spout Springs Library is also equipped with the latest in library technology, and has a radio frequency identification checkout system allowing patrons to set a stack of books onto a platform that checks out all selected books at once.

By the end of summer, James said the location will boast 65,000 books, DVDs and CDs for checkout. The branch also has a Spanish-language section, containing novels, recipe and art books for various ages.

"Libraries have always been a family place. We want to encourage pleasure and educational reading for everyone," James said. "You're never too old to learn something new