



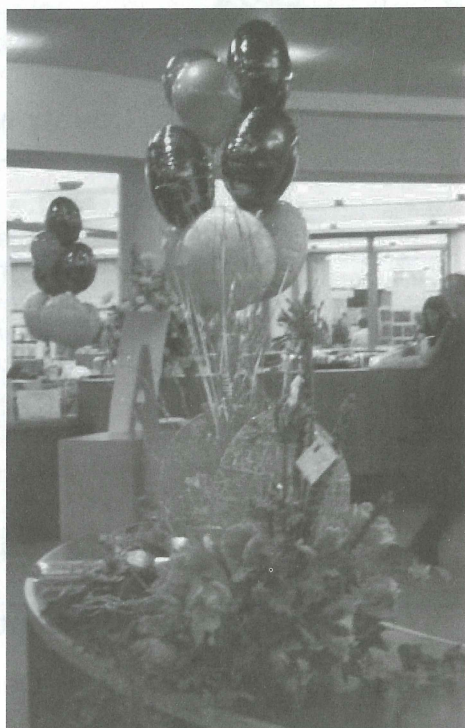
by Victoria Ford

Ocean County Residents Find So Much More to Check Out At Their Local Libraries

While each of the 20 branches in the Ocean County Library system has always served as its community's premier source for reading and reference materials, now more than ever folks are discovering how much more there is to "check out" at the local library.

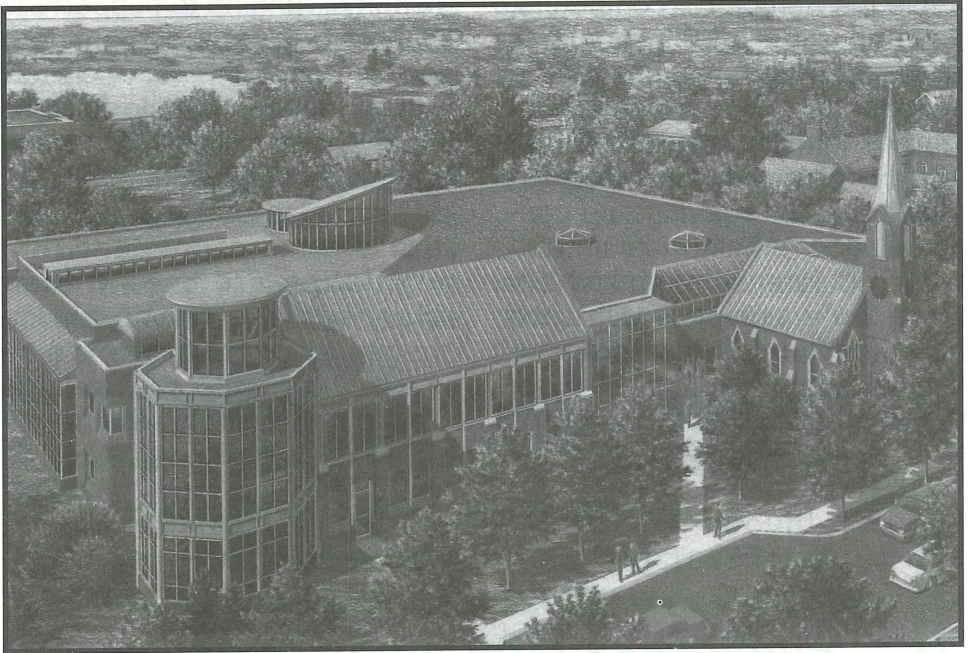
For starters, all branches will be highlighting notable ladies throughout March, Women's History Month, with various female-centric programs. The celebration kicks off March 1 at 6 p.m. at the newly renovated and reopened Toms River branch (also the system's administrative headquarters), with the naming of the Spotlight Woman of the Year followed by a coffee and dessert reception, all happening in the brand new, 250-seat concert hall and special event venue, Mancini Hall.

Two days later at the same place and time, the Kit's Kaboodle Interactive Theatre Company presents "Women's Rights," combining history, improvisation, music and dance to introduce the audience to



suffragist movement visionaries Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Frederick Douglass and Susan B. Anthony. The following Wednesday, March 8, a showing of the documentary film "5 Girls" in Mancini Hall begins at 7.

On the 21st at 6 p.m., author Rachel Simmons conducts a book talk and signing for her works, *Odd Girl Out* and *Odd Girl Speaks Out*, which brings to



light the realities of girls' methods of bullying, which can be every bit as vicious and hurtful as the shoving and punching that more commonly occurs among boys.

And finally, on March 25 from 9:30 a.m. to 3 p.m., Girls' Career Day features keynote speaker, comic strip artist and actress Lela Lee. Co-sponsored by the Business and Professional Women's Committee and the Women's History Month Committee, the event encourages high school women to pursue their professional dreams.

What better time to celebrate national Poetry Month than in April, as springtime reaches its height? In honor of self-expression through lyric and verse, members of the Toms River High School poetry club, SHARD, will hold two open mic

events on April 3 and 4, both beginning at 7 in Mancini Hall.

Library goers should check their local facilities' schedules of events during the months of March and April and during National Library Week, April 2 through 8.

The now complete \$13 million renovation project at the Toms River branch is just one example of the many ways in which the library system as a whole is evolving, in these days of rapidly advancing technology and fast-paced lifestyles, to better serve, enlighten and entertain the ever-growing and changing population of Ocean County.

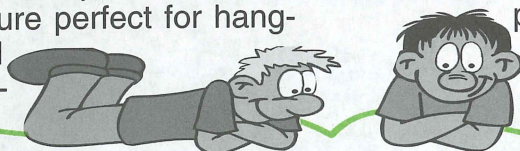
"Everything's really been spruced up," program coordinator Scott Rodas said. "It's going to be a great thing for the county."

"Spruced up" is one way to put it. The changes at the

Toms River branch include twice the original space, a total of 100,000 square feet; the aforementioned special event venue named for the late Ocean County Freeholder and Library Champion James J. Mancini; triple the number of computers, plus an all-new 20-station Dell computer lab for public use; a colorful and comfortable Discovery Room for young children; study rooms designated for quiet or silent reading and contemplation; small, medium and large conference rooms; and a Teen Zone, complete with cool, cozy furniture perfect for hanging out and a wall-

handles public relations and promotions of the library's programs and services, also acts as liaison to the Library Foundation, established four years ago. The Foundation functions primarily to seek alternative means of funding to support the library's programs and services and, in doing so, works closely with the library to help fulfill its ongoing mission of "Connecting People, Building Community."

Rodas said he is proud of "the way the county and (its) population are behind their library, so much" and how, in the process of expanding to such a large building, the friend-



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mounted 45-inch plasma television.

The interior design, by Suzan Globus' Globus Design Associates of Red Bank, carries the suggestion of ocean waves and beach sand through every facet of the décor, from colors to structural shapes and layout. A delicate balance of cool blues and warm golds dominate the color scheme, while soft curves and rounded edges characterize the walls, desks, tables, countertops and furnishings.

"It's not your grandparents' library," chief librarian Mary Malagiere said, summing up the new image. Malagiere, who

liness, familiarity and personal touch – the sense of neighborhood – have remained intact.

What means the most to Malagiere with regard to the expansion is "the wide open, welcoming space this building provides" to the public. It's important to her that people turn to their libraries not only as a source for reading materials but as "a destination place," a venue for visual and performance art, for exhibition and display.

Fittingly, the Toms River branch now boasts a 40-foot long gallery space outside of Mancini Hall, where exhibits will

be installed on approximately a four-week rotation. In May, the library welcomes the traveling panel exhibition "Alexander Hamilton: The Man Who Made Modern America," which Malagiere described as "really, quite an honor," considering Toms River is one of only 40 locations nationwide to play host.

The grand re-opening at the end of January was blessed with beautiful weather for its ribbon-cutting ceremony and weekend-long celebration (plans for which had been in the works since last June), featuring activities, performances and demonstrations for all ages – author events, art and science exhibits, live comedy, drama and music, computer technology training sessions and a teen dance revolution tournament – while loveable costumed characters like Bob the Builder and Sparks the library mascot milled about, posing for photo ops with families and friends.

Branch manager John Glace said the weekend "met our most hopeful expectations" and that the feeling in the air was one of "great excitement" as thousands of people filled the building and grounds. Glace is new to the Toms River branch, though previously he had managed the county's second largest branch, in Jackson, a 28,000 square-foot space. "Everybody's just amazed and happy about how large it is and how much it's changed from the old building," Glace said of the feedback he had received from attendees of the grand reopening. "I haven't heard one negative thing about it. ... We're the biggest venue in Dover Township – certainly the

biggest cultural institution."

With 20 branches and 635 employees plus many dedicated volunteers, Ocean County's is the largest library network in the state, and for good reason, with a service base of 550,000. Daily, the Toms River branch alone serves 19,000 people, and four delivery vans travel to all reaches of the county transporting more than 5,000 items at borrowers' requests.

Like magic, the delivery system "is one of those things that people, they don't know how it happens, they just know the book they want is there when they want it," Rodas said with a smile. It's something people take for granted – but in a good way.

Users should also be aware that the library system's web site, www.oceancountylibrary.org, holds a wealth of information and helpful tools for managing a cardholder's account. The well designed, easy-to-navigate site provides access to the county-wide catalog as well as branch hours and locations, driving directions and plenty of resources for community outreach.

Ocean County Library

Please contact your local library branch or visit

www.oceancountylibrary.org

for a complete listing of the many arts/cultural events going on throughout all 20 library branches in March and April. Not all events have been listed in this guide due to space limitations. Contact

Toms River Library Headquarters
(732) 349-6200
for more information.