

Oakland libraries' Piedmont Avenue branch growing, expanding at new site

By J.M. Brown Correspondent

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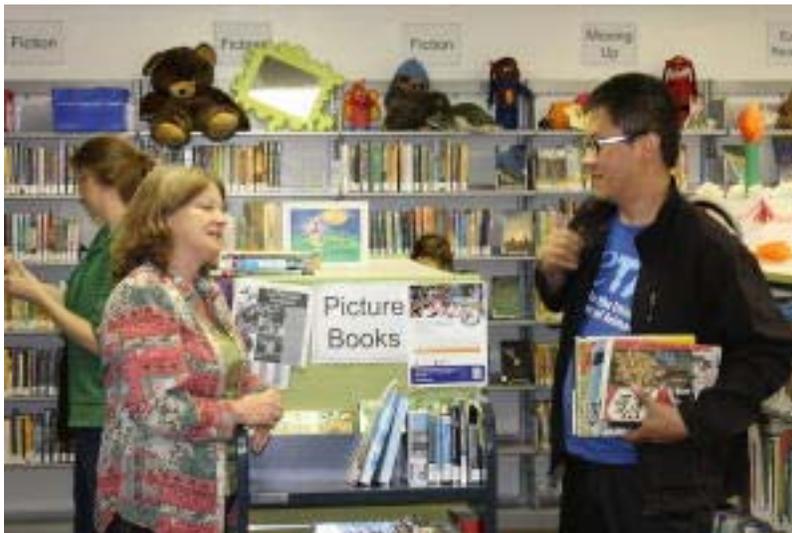
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OAKLAND -- Eight months after relocating, the Piedmont Avenue branch of the Oakland Public Library is settling into its larger digs and growing its customer base by broadening its community outreach.

The 81-year-old branch moved in November 2012 to the campus of Piedmont Avenue Elementary, about six blocks from its former home on 41st Avenue. The library's landlord had raised the rent from \$1 to \$4,250.

The renovated modular classroom building that now houses the branch at 80 Echo Ave. is 1,920 square feet, about 200 more square feet than the 41st Avenue site. It also offers more seating, a handicapped-accessible restroom and two computers.

The branch retains its collection of nonfiction, fiction, children's books and audio materials. Long known for its extensive materials pertaining to lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people, the branch has, like others in the system, integrated that collection into its general collection. Branch manager Jenera Burton said she didn't know what to expect after the move, but said all signs indicate use of the library is expanding. The branch works closely with the school to provide access during and after class.



Library assistant Alice McCain talks to new patron Henry Chen of Oakland at the Piedmont Avenue library branch, which relocated last year.

"We are getting different families, and we are definitely seeing new faces," Burton said.

Oakland resident Henry Chen walked to the branch for the first time recently after getting his library card.

"It just didn't occur to me to go for a long time, but it makes economic sense," he said.

Rockridge resident Noah Goldstein also appreciates the value of checking out materials for sons Isaiah, 8 and Julian, 5. Even though there is a larger library branch in Rockridge, the family visited the Piedmont Avenue branch recently after a round of T-ball.

"It's an unending resource for books (for the children), and for me, I save a lot of money," Goldstein said.

While the branch has attracted new customers, Burton said her biggest challenge has been getting the word out about the relocation. She wants to make sure all the longtime users also keep visiting.

"It's great being on the avenue and being where all the action is," she said. "But it's also nice to be in a neighborhood."

To raise the branch's profile, there are a number of community activities planned in coming weeks. In addition to classes on resume and financial planning and weekly story times, the library will host a National Night Out ice cream social at 5:30 p.m. Tuesday and Cowgirl Creamery representatives will discuss their history and offer samples during an Aug. 13 event called "Cheese and Chat," which will be from 6:30 to 8 p.m.

Burton, who oversees three full-time workers and a small part-time staff, said she is open to other ideas about how to use the branch, which includes a large outdoor space that presently contains a table, book drop-box and pushcart for books.

"Whatever people want to do, I'll do," she said. "I'm here to serve the community."

And there is more change afoot. On Sept. 16, the branch is one of four that will open on Monday. The branch will close instead on Saturday, which Burton said is one of its slower days. The branch's weekly late night will also change from Tuesday to Monday, when it will be open until 8 p.m.

IF YOU GO

What: Piedmont Avenue branch of Oakland Public Library

Where: 80 Echo Ave., Oakland

Information: <http://www.oaklandlibrary.org> or call 510-597-5011