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LANE DADDONA

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Window seats and building blocks stored within East Hampton's initials are part of the attractions in the wing's toddler room.

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# Library goes full sail to enthrall children

Nautical touches in new East Hampton wing let kids' imaginations soar



**ON THE COVER.** A book is better when it's being read under the sails of the giant windmill at the center of the East Hampton Library addition.

BY WILL JAMES  
will.james@newsday.com

Once upon a time, East Hampton Library's board of managers dreamed up a new children's addition. That was 11 years ago, before many of the wing's eventual patrons were even born.

After more than a decade of court battles, procedural wrangling and fundraising, the \$6.5 million addition finally opened on June 21. As children burst through the doors, they came into a 6,800-square-foot space with a nautical theme that highlights eastern Long Island's past. It was crafted by Manhattan-based Lee H. Skolnick Archi-



The new children's wing opened its doors June 21.

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ecture + Design Partnership and is supposed to look like no other library in the country, the project's designers said.

Librarians sit behind — or, rather, inside — a desk shaped

like a 16-foot-long dory. A pair of 10-foot-tall model lighthouses, complete with blinking lights, marks the entrance to the toddlers' section, where children can tap on six iPads pro-



grammed with educational apps.

Overhead, lights shaped like flocking seagulls, or perhaps white books cracked open at the spine, hang from a ceiling painted like a pale sky at the beach.

On the floor, a sprawling map depicts the East End, complete with a sea serpent slithering off the South Fork and American Indians rowing a canoe across Peconic Bay.

"I think it came out beautifully," said Silke Oellrich of Springs, who brought her chil-



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dren, ages 16 months, 5 and 8, to the library the week after it opened. "I think they did such a great job with the architecture, and they tied in the water and the nautical, and everything that symbolizes what the Hamptons is around us."

Perhaps the most striking feature is a 16-foot-tall windmill towering over it all, like an oversized toy. It's easy to forget that the addition also made room for 10,000 more books.

"We wanted something new,

fresh and different, something no other library had," said Tom Twomey, the chairman of the library's board of managers, as he stood in the addition several days after its grand opening.

As Twomey spoke, topiaries shaped like a penguin and a deer could be seen seemingly peering through windows from a manicured courtyard behind him. It was formerly a garden that was in disarray, he said, but was redesigned by Mar-

ders, a nursery and garden center in Bridgehampton.

Downstairs, the Baldwin Family Lecture Room houses a projector that will stream live New York Public Library events, such as author talks, on a 7-by-12-foot screen. Actor Alec Baldwin, an Amagansett resident, donated \$1.375 million toward the project.

Contributions by 300 donors and state grants funded almost the entire cost of the addition, which was under construction

for two years. The library is still trying to raise \$200,000 in donations to cover some bills.

The donations also covered improvements throughout the library, including new air conditioning equipment, carpeting, painting and shelves.

Despite a successful fundraising campaign, the addition almost didn't happen. East Hampton Village's zoning board of appeals refused for years to

**"We wanted something new, fresh and different," said the chairman of the library's board of managers. The design of the space includes touches such as lighthouse models, a windmill and a whimsical floor map.**

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See COVER STORY on G6

# Island in a sea of books

## COVER STORY from G4

issue variances for the project. A State Supreme Court justice eventually sided with the library and ruled that the board had been “irrational, arbitrary and capricious” in its denial.

Twomey, an attorney, said 10 years of tribulations added to the thrill of the grand opening.

“We’re ecstatic,” he said. “We had no idea when we started 11 years ago that it would take so many years and so many generous donors in the community to put together a small and beautiful addition to this library.”

The new wing is open to all, and patrons with a card from a Suffolk County library can check out books or media. The library, at 159 Main St., is open 10 a.m. to 7 p.m. Monday through Thursday; 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Friday and Saturday; and 1 p.m. to 5 p.m. on Sunday.

On Friday, children’s entertainer Mr. Skip will perform at 11:30 a.m. for children 2 and up. Registration is required (call 631-324-0222 ext. 2 or email [childrens@easthamptonlibrary.org](mailto:childrens@easthamptonlibrary.org) and include the child’s name, age, a contact phone number and hometown).

“We’ve been overwhelmed with the response that we’ve seen from the public when they experience the addition for the first time,” said library director Dennis Fabiszak.

He said the new wing started with a push for more space after the library’s staff and board determined that its children’s collection had fewer books per capita than any other East End library. Now that the addition is complete, 4,000 books so far have been added, Fabiszak said.

Twomey said one challenge was making the new addition’s exterior blend seamlessly with the rest of the building, the oldest section of which dates to 1912. The library board hired Robert A.M. Stern Architects, the same firm that designed a 1997 addition, for the task. East Hampton builder Ben Krupinski constructed the wing.

Parents of the young patrons liked what they saw.

Casey Laytin, of East Hampton, who brought her two children, ages 18 months and 4, to the library, said she liked how “old-school puzzles” sat alongside iPads in the toddlers’ section. “I like how they have the old and the new,” she said.

“It’s just really beautiful,” Laytin added. “It’s nice to have a place out here that’s free, that you can bring your kids to that doesn’t cost a fortune.”



Librarians in the information center sit within a 16-foot desk structure fashioned to resemble a boat.



Kiel Oellrich, 5, of East Hampton, gets assistance from his sister Marlena, 8, at a library computer station. A lighthouse model, right, stands guard.





A child reads at a table in the toddler room.

RANDEE DADDONA

## History just a wing away

East Hampton Library's new children's addition is filled with references to the East End's nautical past: an information desk shaped like a boat, two glowing lighthouse models and murals that depict whales ducking beneath the waves.

It mirrors a unique feature of the library itself: an extensive local history collection that houses 19th century whaling logs from Sag Harbor, a scrap of cloth once carried by Captain William Kidd and the original Dongan Patent, the royal decree that created local self-government among East Hampton's fishermen and farmers in 1686.

It's all housed in a quiet, softly lit hall, much of which is encased in a concrete shell meant to protect the rare

items, said Tom Twomey, chairman of the library's board of managers.

Twomey said the Long Island Collection makes East Hampton Library "one of the finest small libraries in America." He said he envisions children falling in love with the addition, then exploring the historical wing as they grow older.

The library is digitizing thousands of historical documents, including decades' worth of local newspapers like the East Hampton Star, in a painstaking process that involves photographing each individual page.

Twomey said the documents, which come from all over Long Island, will be available in a searchable form online.

— WILL JAMES



Board chairman Tom Twomey says the facility is "one of the finest small libraries in America."

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