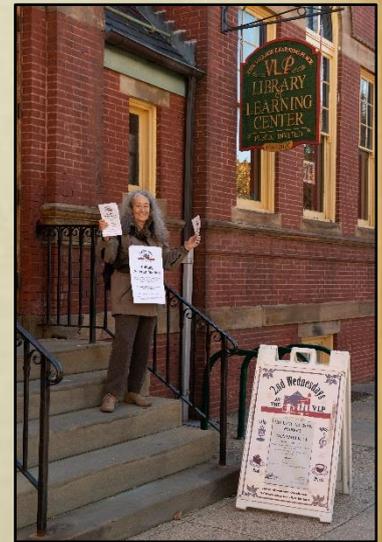


Neverending Stories

“When the Enoch Pratt Library announced the decision to close the historic Saint Paul Street branch, my husband Lee and I joined with other neighbors in a year-long attempt to keep the library opened. When this failed, we helped motivate our neighbors and elected representatives to transform the building into a community-run library, learning center, and meeting place based on a “Vision Plan” created with extensive community input. After the plan was approved at a large neighborhood meeting we spent many evenings around our dining room table, with Frank Jannuzi, Sarah Begus, Odette Ramos, and others writing grants to turn the plan into a reality.

When we negotiated with Baltimore City for a long-term lease, we had not yet raised much money but we decided to begin restoring the interior of the library with volunteer labor. As an example, Peter Duval organized a major effort to strip 100 years of paint to restore the beauty of the original woodwork, and I led the effort to strip the brick walls of the vestibule. By assuming full responsibility for setting the goals of the facility, raising money to renovate it, and contributing many hours of physical and intellectual labor, we all gained a sense of community and an emotional attachment to the project that continues to this day.



Phyllis on the steps of the Village Learning Center, promoting 2nd Wednesdays, the adult cultural program she started.

One of the arguments the Pratt invented to justify closing the original library was that the building was too small and that it would be unaffordable to make it larger. Although there was no supporting evidence for their conclusion, we quickly discovered we could double the floor space at minimal cost by converting the basement, previously used only for storage, into a beautiful space for a computer laboratory and after school programs. We even transformed the former main circulation desk into a basement coffee bar run as a student entrepreneur program.

One of our best decisions was to expand the library beyond the building walls. An important first step was to enclose the north and east sides of the rear with tall brick walls to create privacy and security. I was part of the garden committee that designed and raised money for brick walks, planted spaces, the raised herb garden, and raised

fountain. The result is a beautiful, tranquil community space for all to enjoy.

From the beginning the library was very successful for young people, but some of us involved in the original project were disappointed that it was not achieving our vision as a space for all ages. We had designed a large central desk on the main floor in part to serve as a food and drink area for frequent adult events, but the space was only infrequently used as originally intended. So several years later I helped create the "2nd Wednesdays" program of free evening talks and concerts — always with food and drinks — to bring more adults into the library to enjoy the lovely interior and garden spaces.

In my life I always try to turn a negative into a positive, and I think in this case the closure of the Pratt branch more than twenty years ago created a more valuable community institution than the one we lost."

— *Phyllis Jaslow, the 2600 Block of North Calvert Street.*