

\$25 million Half Hollow Hills Community Library features surround-sound theater, podcast studio, 3D printer, state-of-the-art kitchen

Carolyn Gusoff

[Community Journalism](#)



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SOUTH HUNTINGTON, N.Y. -- Public libraries, shuttered during much of the COVID pandemic, are reinventing themselves to keep up with demand in a digital world.

On Long Island, the brand new Half Hollow Hills Community Library, with a \$25 million price tag, just opened in South Huntington. As CBS2's Carolyn Gusoff reported Monday, creative new offerings may be coming to your neighborhood, too.

What's a surround-sound movie theater doing in a library? And a state-of-the-art kitchen?

"Our librarians are going to be teaching kids how to make soup or a salad or roast a chicken," said Helen Crosson, Half Hollow Hills Community Library director.

The community had its wish list for the new Half Hollow library and the result is a model for the library of the future.

Vintage card catalogs are filled with free vegetable seeds.

"We have come leaps and bounds from microfiche," said Chris Sarubbi, network and systems technician. "We are fully covered with Wi-Fi so a patron can in 6 a.m., 2 o'clock in the morning, there is Wi-Fi fully accessible in the entire parking lot."

"A 21st century library is a community space, a place where people can gather, learn, exchange ideas, enjoy concerts," Crosson said.

There's padded flooring for sound-proofed fitness classes, technology for community meetings and a maker space with engravers and 3D printers.

"We are actually printing a 3D model of a Pokémon for a local child," Librarian Anthony Giasante said. "We are also printing bones for a local doctor. He uses it to

teach medical school ... A modern-day library really functions as a place to explore their curiosities while we engage with them and education them."

"We are going to be coming a lot more often," Veronica Remy said.

"The library is no longer just for books. The library is for everything you are interested in," said Maria Baecher from Melville.

It's all sustainable; cork flooring, geocooling, even parking lot asphalt was reused.

It's no longer just books and newspapers you can borrow for free. The library now has fully-loaded streaming sticks you can take home to watch hours of free programming.

But none of this comes for free. Funded by taxpayers, demand doubled for e-books in just the last five years.

"We are seeing people coming back to the libraries in droves, seeing young people use it as a social space after school," said Kevin Verbese, Suffolk Cooperative Library System director. "The challenge is balancing those needs."

Verbese said every community library is working toward keeping up with demand, which the pandemic sped up dramatically.

The library also offers test prep and job coaching, homework help and a podcast studio. Nonresidents are welcome, as well.

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Carolyn Gusoff has covered some of the most high profile news stories in the New York City area and is best known as a trusted, tenacious, consistent and caring voice of Long Island's concerns.

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