



Tech Annex

Blue Island Public Library,
Blue Island, Illinois

Description: Beneath the main level of the Blue Island Public Library, both the future and the past come to life. In the back of the Youth Services department, beside the history museum, far away from the library's hushed voices and serene atmosphere, teens enjoy their own unique and creative room, Tech Annex. In this space, youth are encouraged to see, hear, think, and do all things technological. As one can imagine, it gets noisy when twenty teens are playing **Wii Sports** or making voice-overs for their machinimas, but the quiet studier can move outside the room to the study table area. The 569-square-foot Annex doubles as a lounge/program area and has a staff workstation. Nine computer stations line the perimeter; each has a specific function. If a teen wants to create a Web page, she can go to station C5 (see floorplan). Another teen might want to edit a video so he would go to station C8. Each station hosts a black, wheeled office chair, and twelve wooden chairs sit around the collaborative worktable in the center of the room. The walls are sprinkled with donated movie posters and artwork, including paintings, charcoal sketches, lithographs, black-and-white photographs, and a mural. The Audio Production station is on the far wall and contains an advanced sound card, sound editing software, a Yamaha keyboard, a mixer, and microphones. The white wall on this side of the Annex serves as the projection area. Immediately outside the exit to the museum is a section used for podcasting. Microphones and headphones are set up in this acoustical area.



PHOTO CREDIT: DARREN THOMPSON

▲ LENA'S CLASSMATES WERE ABLE TO LISTEN TO THE PODCAST OF A CHILDREN'S BOOK THAT SHE CREATED FOR THE LIBRARY.

Microphones and headphones are set up in this acoustical area. The Tech Annex provides resources for teens to work on technological creation, production, development, and animation. The workstations offer Microsoft Office, the library catalog, filtered Internet access, and various databases, including FirstSearch, ArticlesFirst, Eric, WilsonSelectPlus, EbscoHost, and NewsBank. Console games, such as **PlayStation 2** and **Xbox**, are played on the VCR/DVD-combo television that sits next to the magazine rack. The computers have DVD players and can also be used as video stations.

Collection: YA-specific items are located around the entire library. Most materials, including CDs, DVDs, reference, and nonfiction are interfiled with adult material on the first floor. Because the YA and adult collections are purchased from the same account, the library cannot keep track of its YA circulation figures separately. One large shelving unit next to the entrance outside of the Tech Annex holds all 1,320 YA fiction titles. Across from it, a four-sided metal rack with wheels contains graphic novels. Teen-

specific magazines have a separate shelving unit inside the Annex next to the fire exit. Board games and video games are also stored in the Annex. The library uses a Sears Catalog arrangement consisting of Marc records with Dewey numbers and Sears subject headings. The 2007–2008 calendar year will be the first in which YA circulation figures are separated from the adult circulation figures. The books are projected to circulate 11,200 times.

Young Adult Population and Community: Located within the Chicago metropolitan area but keeping its quaint-town feel with only 23,473 citizens, Blue Island is so named because early pioneers thought the ridge of land looked like an island in the prairie from a distance. The city hosts a diverse population, with fairly equal numbers of Hispanic (37.9 percent), white (36.2 percent), and African American (24.1 percent) residents. More than 13 percent are below the poverty line; many have no computer access at home. The library serves 2,740 students from one middle and one high school—of these students, 71 percent are classified as low income. The high school did not meet its Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) in the 2006–2007 school year.

Hours, Staffing, and Teen Traffic: Blue Island Public Library is open Monday to Thursday from 9:00 a.m. to 9:00 p.m., Friday and Saturday from 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., and Sunday from 1:00 p.m. to 5:00 p.m. Tech Annex is open special hours in conjunction with the library: Monday to Thursday from 3:45 p.m. to 8:45 p.m., and Saturday and Sunday from 1:00 p.m. to 5:00 p.m. Because the room is out of sight from the staff workstations, it needs to be covered when teens are present. The Annex draws approximately 65 youth daily during after-school hours and 25 teens on weekends. Adults and children may use the room during special programs or outside of the teen hours, but the 13 to 18 age limit is enforced. In addition to covering IT issues within the library, the IT Department manages the Tech Annex. This staff consists of one full-time professional IT, Technical, and Young Adult Programming Manager; a part-time professional IT Assistant; and two part-time paraprofessional IT Clerks. There is also a full-time professional Youth Services Manager who oversees the YA collection.



PHOTO CREDIT: DARREN THOMPSON

▲ THESE TEENS ARE USING RADIOS TO ADD VOICE-OVERS TO THEIR HALO MACHINIMA.

▼ AFTER THE PASSPORT TO CHILE EVENT, YOUTH BRANCH OFF TO THEIR PREFERRED STATIONS.



PHOTO CREDIT: DARREN THOMPSON

Planning Process: The Blue Island Public Library has renovated only once since its construction in 1971—the 2006 addition of a YA space. The planning started in September 2005 when Darren Thompson, Manager of IT, Technology, and YA

Programming, wanted to bring a technology center to the library. He was inspired by the Wired for Youth (WFY) Centers in the Austin Public Library, Austin, Texas, and used his background in virtual reality, medical imaging, computer vision, the motion capture industry, and the gaming industry to design and create the Tech Annex. After receiving approval from Library Director Patty Wanninger, they jointly presented the idea to the Library Board. With the Board's okay, Thompson approached the Blue Island Public Library Foundation and the Friends of the Blue Island Public Library for donations, who contributed \$3000 and \$500, respectively.



▲ AFTER TEENS CREATE A VIDEO, IT IS DISPLAYED ON THE WALL FOR EASY DIALOGUE SYNCHRONIZATION.

Renovations started in December 2005 and took only four months to complete. A fifth month was reserved for selected students to use the resources and provide feedback. Any necessary changes in the software and hardware configurations were then made. New electrical work, an Ethernet drop, and a video patch panel were installed; the room was painted; a projector was mounted; and new carpet and furniture were added. To allow for maximum flexibility in content creation, ten computers were built with video and audio production, graphic arts, 3D modeling and animation, Web development, and game design capabilities. To keep costs low, computers were built in-house and Thomson secured donations and loans for the artwork.

On April 6, 2006, the mayor of Blue Island officially opened the room to the public with a ribbon-cutting ceremony. The library's teens created a 3D animation opening video to demonstrate the potential uses of the Annex's resources.

Youth Participation and Programming: The library's Teen Advisory Board (TAB) meets monthly to give a voice to teen patrons and also to serve as volunteer coordinators and staff members for the Tech Annex in the following areas: Video Production, Audio Production, Graphic Arts, 3D Modeling and Animation, Web Development, and Interior Design. These teens work on individual tasks and projects for the library and the community. For example, they created a mural in the Annex and helped with the digitization of the museum to make it accessible from the Web. An anime interest group, facilitated by a local volunteer, meets monthly. Some teens participate in the Reading Buddies program that gives young children a head start in reading by having the teens read to them. Other activities include OpenMic Night and Passport To . . . , which involves traveling to a different country each month using **Google Earth**, listening to the country's music using **Winamp**, and sampling some of the country's recipes. In the past, they have "visited" places such as Turkey, Chile, and Japan, and in January 2008, the teens journeyed to India. **Youth's Corner** (<http://www.blueislandlibrary.org/library/5d.htm>) is the teen page on the library's Web site where youth can listen to podcasts and watch videos of their own recordings; find links to school resources, sports and fitness Web sites, and books of interest; and read reviews of the latest YA books.

TRUE CONFESSIONS FROM IT, TECHNICAL, AND YA PROGRAMMING MANAGER DARREN THOMPSON

This is the YA space of my dreams because . . . "It stimulates creativity and higher-level thinking skills, has great artwork, and it is very functional and

flexible. [Creating] the Tech Annex has been a great experience, and it's been both fun and exciting to watch the teens grow and watch them learn while they're having fun."

I still dream of these improvements: "A larger space, a designated audio recording studio, a designated video production studio with blue screen capabilities, [different] furniture, video conferencing, virtual reality, and more advanced software and hardware."

TEEN PATRON COMMENTS

What do you think about the Tech Annex? "The Tech Annex's friendly environment is what attracted me to it in the first place. Not only is it fun and full of many diverse people, but it also gives great opportunities to those who wish to work in the video game industry and the movie industry. You learn and you grow here, and I like how everyone is accepted."—Tiffany Cole, age 15

What have you been doing in the Tech Annex? "I have been . . . making a machinima using **Halo** and two **Xboxes**. A machinima is video produced from the recording of game play. Dialogue and sound effects are added after the video has been produced. At times it can be difficult to make."—Brian Moreno, age 15

Have you learned any new skills? If so, what? "I've learned how to manage time to meet a deadline and to think on a more professional level in order to improve the quality of my work."—Brit L. Castaneda, age 17

DARREN'S TIPS FOR DESIGNING AND OPERATING A SIMILAR SPACE.

- Involve the teens in the design process and allow them to add artwork and content to their space.
- Hire the right staff to supervise the space. Look for someone who is mature, is not intimidated by and likes to work with teens, is a mentor and not their "best friend," is not afraid of technology and has a good technical skill-set, is creative and self-motivated, can tolerate higher noise levels, and is a team player.
- Try to design and locate the space so that the louder noise levels are not an issue to the rest of the library.
- Work closely with local schools so that when school resources are unavailable, students can work on their projects at your library. For students not enrolled in music, art, or production classes, the library becomes the outlet in which teens can learn and use those resources.
- Record events at the local schools and post the content on the library's Web site for the entire community to enjoy.
- Have the teens work on community projects, such as documenting the history of the library's city.
- Ensure that the teens feel they have ownership of the space.

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To submit your YA dream space for consideration, request a YA Spaces submission form from Sarah Baltic at toll-free phone (888) 486-9297 or e-mail sbaltic@scarecrowpress.com.

