

## 1990s

### **Growth Pleads for New Facility**

As the decade turned, library patronage soared. The library was packed with people every available day and night. Between 1990 and 1991, the number of library card holders grew 10 percent. Borrowing increased by 28,000, and reference questions by 10,500. The time seemed right to act on the Thompson recommendations for a new library.

The construction proposal received editorial support from the *Berwyn LIFE*:

By nursing and patching two aging buildings, Berwyn Library staff members have tried to stuff the informational and technological explosion of the 1980s and '90s into structures built in the '60s.

A succession of librarians have climbed atop the buildings at 16th Street and 34th Street to tar the roofs; taken up hammers to install dividing walls; and taken home chairs to paint and refinish — all to save taxpayers money

Staff members have divided library collections and services between the two buildings and moved whole departments of books and furnishings from the first floor to balcony to basement — all to secure space for vitally needed materials.

But there were problems with the division of services, the paper noted. North side residents were irritated that story times and videos were offered almost exclusively in the South Branch. South side patrons coveted the full reference service housed in the North.

“Research-minded [South Berwyn residents] rebel at waiting for materials to be delivered from one branch to another,” observed the newspaper. “If they have to drive to 16th Street for reference works, patrons say, they might as well keep on driving to the Oak Park library, which has more to offer.”

Staff time had to be divided between the two locations, resulting in fewer hours of service at each. The 16th Street Children’s Department was open only from 1:30 to 9 p.m. Mondays through Thursdays and until 6 p.m. Fridays during the school year. Space was so limited at the 16th Street location that children’s programs could be offered only once or twice a year. Director Koppe believed preschoolers were “getting left out.”

The newspaper article continued:

In peak evening and weekend hours, seating was totally inadequate. People huddled around one or two tables adjacent to the circulation desk, their concentration broken by jangling telephones and the exchange of questions and answers by staff members and patrons.

Since there was no public meeting room, patrons attending Library movie nights contended with the glare of city streetlights and passing cars through curtainless windows. The library had no computers for public use because there was no place to put them.

Apart from two basement closets and a portion of the boiler room, the library had basically no storage space. Bound newspapers and periodicals were stored in basement hallways next to the boiler room in both branches.

All collections were at “virtual no-growth.” No additional shelving could be installed without reducing already limited table seating. The freestanding shelves were almost totally full; the collections required frequent heavy weeding; and the library’s holdings sagged below state standards for a facility of its size.

In 1990, a joint City/Library Advisory Board was formed. Aldermen Anthony DiMenna and Michael Woodward and the city’s administrative coordinator, Lawrence Zdarsky, represented City Hall. Representing the library were Director Koppe and Board Members Nevaril-Lhotka, Scola and Betty Wojcik, who was also director of the Berwyn Development Corporation.

Zdarsky suggested the committee take another look at the possibility of establishing the library as an independent taxing district. Noting that the Berwyn Park District was negotiating to buy property at 29th Street and Oak Park Avenue, land long desired as a library building site, Zdarsky suggested other possibilities. One alternative might be to swap the existing library branches for Berwyn Township land on which to construct a new library, Zdarsky said. Another might be to convert the present City Hall into a library and construct a new municipal building elsewhere.

### **Building Hopes Center on Park**

Neither proposal gained acceptance, and finally, on the advice of the joint committee, the Library Board recommended to the City Council that the best, most cost-effective plan was to build a new facility on the western boundary of city-owned Janura Park at 28th Street and Oak Park Avenue.

Again with the help of the joint advisory body, the Library Board voted 6-1 on February 11, 1991, to hire the architectural firm of PSA to design a new building. Board President Scola cast the dissenting vote, saying she did not feel the Board was in a position to hire an architect “because the necessary funds are not in the budget.” However, Mrs. Scola joined in the decision to employ PSA for prerferendum schematic design services contingent on approval by the City Council of a \$25,000 line item in the budget. Casting the lone nay on the second vote was Member Suzanne Camacho.

As North Berwyn residents became aware that change was in the wind, they began attending Library Board meetings to express their views. In February, a group of North Berwynites said they did not favor keeping the North Branch open unless it continued to offer juvenile books. By April, another group of North Berwynites, fearful their branch would be closed, began lobbying to expand the existing libraries rather than build a new central facility. In response, the Board allotted an additional \$3,500 for PSA Architect David Patton to study that possibility.

That summer the library began publishing a newsletter to make the case for a new building and muster public support for a bond issue referendum to support its construction.

“Berwyn’s current library, housed in two separate buildings, is one of the smallest libraries serving one of the largest populations in the suburbs,” the publication noted. “Because the two buildings together offer almost three times less space than the state requirements for a community of Berwyn’s size, the library can offer only half the number of books suggested by state guidelines.

“Unfortunately, structural problems and lot sizes limit the renovation of existing buildings,” noted Director Koppe. “Preliminary studies show the structures may not be able to withstand second story additions. Also, heating and cooling systems appear inadequate; the buildings are not handicapped accessible; and parking, especially at 34th Street, is a problem.”

Mrs. Koppe said these concerns would be addressed in the PSA feasibility study. She encouraged residents to take part in public hearings to be held by the architects. “This is our opportunity to create a great library,” she urged.

PSA architects presented a design for a two-story brick and stone structure “reminiscent of early 20th century American architecture.” The building would feature a public information area near the front entrance, a children’s story room and a series of intimate reading areas or “front rooms” for the various departments. A large public meeting room would house up to 200 people but would be equipped with folding partitions to accommodate smaller groups as well. A separate entrance would permit adult programming even when other library services were closed.

The proposed construction carried a \$7.9 million price tag, including the cost of moving existing tennis courts and a wading pool from the Janura Park site.

That July, the Library Board learned of more expenses to come. Administrative Coordinator Zdarsky told the Board the referendum also would have to seek funds for the development of a soccer field for Berwyn.

“The Library Board was taken aback by Mr. Zdarsky’s statement,” Board Secretary Karasek recorded in the minutes. “It was a new hitch in the referendum.”

### **Referendum Postponed**

That fall, the *Berwyn LIFE* editorials were urging the Library to “Go for it! ... Ask voters if they will buy into the dream.” The Library Board held back.

Citing numerous funding requests already in place on the November ballot and “recent property assessments which have severely affected taxpayers,” the Board decided to sit out the November election and wait until spring.

In December, the City Council voted to place the binding library construction referendum on the March 17 ballot along with two advisory referendums regarding senior housing and registration of legal nonconforming properties.

By the next month, the Council withdrew the two advisory referendums and asked the Library Board to withdraw its referendum as well. City officials wanted to make room on the ballot for a referendum requested by the Berwyn-based National Taxpayers United of Illinois seeking repeal of Berwyn’s home rule powers.

Although it was only necessary to withdraw one referendum, Mayor Lanzillotti maintained the three deletions would enable voters to focus on the issue of home rule and enable the city to “battle one-on-one a proposal presented as tax relief but really a matter of autonomy. Home rule,” the mayor said, “allows a city to operate without state oversight to pass its own ordinances to protect its people and assist in community and economic development.”

To place a nearly \$8 million bond issue to be paid for through property taxes on the same ballot as the home rule issue “could be construed as inconsistent and confusing to the voter,” the mayor said. “We could put both in jeopardy. Our department heads feel the library is only one of the city’s seven departments, whereas home rule affects every department,” Mayor Lanzillotti said. “The library will not suffer by sacrificing at this time a matter that can easily be brought forward in the future.”

Nevertheless, the Library Board voted to keep the bond issue on the ballot.

Despite reservations voiced by President Scola and Vice President Marrone that the library might become a bone of contention in the larger fight between the city and the taxpayers group, they joined in the unanimous vote to pursue the March 17 referendum.

“We did not want to give the appearance of backing down from a fight with the taxpayers group,” Library Board Secretary Wojcik explained to city officials. “We understand the city’s position and will work to support you. We have to do what is best for the library, and you have to do what is best for the city.”

The City Council then did what it thought best and voted to delete the library referendum from the ballot. Library backers had no choice but to prepare for a November election instead.

The PSA building model that was prepared to promote the March referendum became part of an informational road show to demonstrate to taxpayers what their \$7.9 million investment could buy. The model helped win the support of many residents, but criticism persisted and alternative suggestions kept on coming.

One alternate proposal was to retool the former Olympic Federal Savings building at 6201 Cermak Road as a central library instead of building a new facility. The proposal was backed by the Berwyn Homeowners Association, and the Library Board took another time out to have PSA examine its feasibility.

By August, the results of the architectural study were in hand.

“It would cost nearly \$1 million more to retool the former Olympic Federal building [than to construct a new library],” Board President Rosemary Scola told the newly formed Committee for a New Berwyn Public Library. Scola said PSA found the Olympic Federal site unsatisfactory primarily because:

- To achieve the square footage experts said was needed for a city of Berwyn’s size, Olympic building space would have to be nearly doubled through construction of an addition.
- Olympic’s off-site parking could make up for only a portion of the on-site spaces that would be lost to the construction of such an addition.
- A significant amount of Olympic floor structures would require replacement and/or reinforcement since its load-bearing capacity was “far short” of the 150 pounds required for library stacks.
- “Antiquated” mechanical, electrical, plumbing and fire protection systems would not meet the needs of a major building expansion.
- Architectural and engineering fees for remodeling would be 1.5 percent higher and construction contingencies double those for a new building.
- Renovating the Olympic facilities was estimated to cost \$8.6 million compared with the \$7.9 million price tag for relocating recreational facilities on city-owned property and constructing a new building.

Helping to make the case for the new construction was this comparison of services then available in the existing library branches, those required under Illinois State Library “Avenues to Excellence” standards, and those that could be offered in the new building:

<b><u>Opportunities for Improvement</u></b>			
<b><u>Materials</u></b>	<b><u>Current</u></b>	<b><u>State Required</u></b>	<b><u>New Building</u></b>
Books	103,633*	131,949	132,300
Periodicals	550	655	680
Audio/visuals	4,198	7,900	10,898
<i>* Includes duplications required to serve two buildings.</i>			
<b><u>Amenity</u></b>	<b><u>Current</u></b>	<b><u>New Library</u></b>	

Parking spaces	7 per branch	100 on site	
Meeting space		None	Space for 200 people
Quiet study areas		None	6 study carrels 2 study rooms
Youth story room		None	Seating for 30 people
Washrooms		1 unisex per building	6 bathrooms
Handicap accessible		Front desk only	Elevators to all services

The *Berwyn LIFE* noted additional advantages to new construction:

“An elevator will bring every library service within reach of elderly and handicapped patrons. [They] no longer will need to wait in the vestibule with their wheelchairs and walkers while staff members chase up and down stairs and through narrow, crowded aisles to secure desired materials.”

As the November 3 referendum neared, the newspaper undertook a series of articles called “Berwyn Books a Referendum.” Among other things, the initial story compared operational costs of operating two buildings as opposed to one:

“According to a State Library Research Center survey, it cost approximately \$100,000 more to operate Berwyn’s two branches in 1987-88 than single libraries in 10 other communities with similar equalized assessed valuations. Most of the overage went for salaries, yet Berwyn’s hourly [pay] rate was less than the other 10.”

Although a new and larger facility might cost more to operate, the newspaper noted, it would enable the library to use staff more efficiently and offer expanded hours, materials and equipment. “This will reduce the operational cost per square foot by \$21.76 annually and offer taxpayers ‘more service for less money.’”

### **Residents Question Plans**

Nevertheless, residents continued to question the project.

In a letter to the Library Board, Mr. Greg Ostrowski, president of the Berwyn Homeowners Association, said his organization believed the November 3 referendum would have a lot better chance of passing “if the plan were complete. As approved by the City Council, the bond issue includes \$150,000 to cover the cost of moving the wading pool and tennis courts.... [Our members] want to know where the existing recreational facilities will be relocated.”

Mr. Ostrowski also noted the referendum authorized the city to sell the existing buildings once a new library is constructed. “The city then is free to use for its own purposes the proceeds from the sale of the buildings, which have a joint appraised value of \$500,000,” he observed. “If there were a commitment by the city that the properties would be sold and the revenues gained would reduce the bond issue cost, residents and taxpayers would have a clear picture of the overall plan.”

The Library Board forwarded the Homeowners Association letter to city officials, noting the Board had no control over the disposition of the city-owned buildings. “We were told it would not be our decision to make,” President Scola said, “and that it was up to the city to do what it wanted with these buildings.”

Some residents thought the existing library buildings should be retained and retooled. Library spokesmen cited PSA estimates that it would cost \$32,000 to repair the 40-year-old buildings and \$20 million for land acquisition and construction to make the combined 18,000 square feet of the two existing branches equal the 58,000 square feet of the new facility. Another \$100,000 would be needed to make the old tri-level buildings comply with the new federal Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). Even worse, to provide wheelchair clearance, half the library shelving would need to be removed, library officials noted.

Still other residents questioned why the present library branches had not been built to last longer than 30 years. Mrs. Nevaril-Lhotka, the only current Board member who had served when the branches were built, responded that they were “the best we could get at the time. In the 1950s we wanted to build only one library, but people wanted one on the north side and one on the south.”

Architect David Patton promised the new library would be built to last, noting the 28th Street site had sufficient space for initial construction of 58,000 square feet plus a later lateral expansion of 18,000 square feet when needed.

Nevertheless, the persistent questioning began taking a toll on referendum supporters. Pessimistically assessing the temper of the community, the Library Board started hedging its bets.

In October, the Board decided to submit to the City Council a 1993 operating budget request of \$723,727 and wait until after the November referendum to request

capital improvements. If the referendum failed, \$45,539 in improvement funds would be requested, with \$32,208 of that amount allotted for repairs, plus:

- \$10,126 to replace frayed carpeting and draperies to block out streetlights interfering with adult film programs at the South Branch;
- \$35,413 for contractual obligations for the new automated circulation system;
- \$1,150 for an ADA-required text telephone for each building to enable the hearing-impaired to print out questions and answers on a computer screen.

Director Koppe explained that the \$29,308 allotted for repairs in 1992 proved inadequate. Even before the heat could be turned on that fall in the North Branch, the boiler had to be repaired and asbestos removed. “We already spent \$32,000,” she said, “and another \$6,900 in bills is expected.”

### **Referendum Rejected**

The 1992 referendum was endorsed by the Berwyn Youth Commission, Berwyn Development Corp., Latinos Organization of Berwyn and the superintendents of both the North and South grade school districts.

But key support was missing. The South Berwyn Council of PTAs found some members viewed the referendum as “political” and so the organization took no stand. North Berwyn parents said they did not think kids would walk to 28th Street and Oak Park Avenue to get to a library. The Berwyn Democratic organization opted to “let the people decide.” However, the party offered promotional literature to precinct captains who wished to distribute it, and one of those who agreed to do so was Mr. Samuel Stillo, president of the Berwyn Property Improvement Board and a member of the North Berwyn Park District Board. Later, as alderman and head of the City Council’s Library Oversight Committee, Mr. Stillo would play a key role in resolving the library’s problems.

Proponents argued that the library bond issue would cost the owner of a \$100,000 market value home only 8 cents per day, “the equivalent of one cup of coffee per week.” Opponents appeared unmoved by the argument. Thus, two days before the election, the

*Berwyn LIFE* was reporting, “Even the most ardent supporters concede it will be a close vote.”

“Close” turned out to be an overstatement. The referendum was defeated 8,929 to 8,142. The proposal carried in only the 1st and 3rd wards.

“We realize the current economic climate had a major impact on the vote,” Board President Scola told the newspaper. Also contributing was a lack of manpower to go door to door to get out the vote. “With less than 15 active workers on the committee and without organized support from the Berwyn Democratic Party,” said Mrs. Scola, “I feel we did good.”

As the votes were tallied November 3, Mayor Joseph Lanzillotti told a *Berwyn LIFE* reporter he was “very proud” that his precinct and his ward had the most votes for the library. He suggested a survey was needed to determine why voters, particularly those in north Berwyn, voted against it.

“For a first-time effort and considering the general anti-tax mood of the voters, I think this was an excellent result,” said Corporation Counsel Zdarsky.

Determined to try again to pass their referendum the following November, library backers continued throughout 1993 to try to persuade residents to support their cause. They argued that if it was fear of higher taxes that led voters to reject the new construction referendum, taxes would have to be raised anyway to rehabilitate the existing buildings.

“Otherwise,” they said, “significant fines will be levied against Berwyn for not abiding by the Americans with Disabilities Act, which requires all buildings to be handicapped accessible. The mandated renovation would destroy much of the current library space because aisles would have to be enlarged and elevators installed.” The library would be unable to access available state funding because there would not be enough room to put additional materials or computers.

### **Relationships Unravel**

By the beginning of 1993, the library’s uncertain status appeared to be fraying relationships between the Library Board and city officials and the Board and the library director.

“After studying their responsibilities as listed in state statutes, Board members in February asked city officials to clarify whether aldermen have authority to cut the library’s levy request and raise staff salaries as had been done in the past,” the *Berwyn LIFE* reported. By April, they also were questioning why nearly \$17,000 in copier fees and late-book fines were deposited into the city’s corporate funds instead of the library’s coffers.

They also asked for city guidelines on departmental use of petty cash. At issue was Director Koppe’s decision to use petty cash funds to purchase \$3,145 in new draperies from a suburb other than Berwyn. No one at the time anticipated that the director’s future might be hanging on those draperies. All Board members thought of was the policy they had established to “buy in Berwyn wherever possible” and to require prior Board approval of expenditures over \$2,000 “except in an emergency.”

“Director Koppe said since the draperies were paid for out of state grant money the expenditure was not the Board’s responsibility but hers as overseer of state funds,” the newspaper reported. But Board members insisted “state laws made the Board responsible for every penny spent.” Board members also questioned the policy of keeping as much as \$1,192 in a checking account labeled petty cash, an account that required the signatures of two staff members for withdrawals but no Board members. The Board decided to wait until after the April elections to discuss these issues with the new mayor.

By April 24, the library had a new problem. The 34th Street Branch ceiling came down on volunteers working at a book sale fundraiser for the Committee to Build a New Berwyn Library.

“We looked up and water was coming in,” Committee Member Diane Jurgaitis recalled. “It was certainly an incentive to build a new library.” The branch’s entire fiction collection had to be removed from the shelves and covered with plastic to protect it from the elements.

Since the company that provided the 10-year warranty for the 1985 roof installation no longer was in business, the City Council was asked to declare an emergency and waive the bidding process to speed up the roof replacement.

On May 17, 1993, the Library Board met with new Mayor Thomas G. Shaughnessy, Aldermen Samuel Stillo and Joseph Keating and Corporation Counsel

Zdarsky to discuss new questions raised by the public regarding the fate of the two branch libraries if a central library were built and to address recurring Board questions regarding Illinois library law.

A *Berwyn LIFE* report and minutes of the meeting offered this account of the discussion:

“Noting the current branches were constructed by referendum and citing state library law that ‘the Library Board takes care of the buildings,’ Board Member Betty Wojcik said, ‘The logical assumption was the buildings were controlled by the Board.’”

“‘You are making the grand assumption those properties are yours,’ Mr. Zdarsky responded. ‘If they were purchased by the city, they are city property.’ By raising the issue, he warned, the Board might be ‘spitting into the fan.’”

The corporation counsel recalled that, at the time of the 1992 referendum, the City Council made no commitment as to whether the existing buildings would be leased or sold; and if sold, whether the proceeds would be used to abate the cost of the new construction or directed to the city or the recreation department, which owns the land on which the new library was to be built. He suggested the Board reach a decision together with the aldermanic committee and city administration.

As to Board concerns that state law specified corporate authorities are to levy at a rate sufficient to meet the budget set by library boards, Zdarsky’s opinion was that “since Berwyn is a home rule community, technically everything in Illinois library law can be pre-empted.

“Since the Library is not a separate district and Berwyn is a home rule community, the library levy is not subject to the maximum rate specified in state law,” Zdarsky said, adding, “The Board can suggest a levy, but the power of appropriations belongs to the City Council.

“Generally, through the appropriations process we decide what our taxpayers can and can’t afford,” he added. “If you take a literal interpretation of this ordinance, the [Library] Board could say to the city, ‘You have no choice but to cut 14 police officers.’ Instead, the parties have sat down and come up with reasonable interpretations. You could probably go into court and try to force the city to levy at a particular rate, but I am not sure what a court would do.”

Mr. Zdarsky said the city tried to levy the maximum possible for the library on the assumption that “eventually the library could become a separate district.” As to the amount of the current levy, he suggested the city comptroller could furnish that information and could provide monthly revenue and expense reports to the library.

As to grant money, copier fees and late-book fines which library staff traditionally deposited in outside checking accounts, the corporation counsel said such funds “absolutely should go through the city’s accounting department” but that the Board should decide how they were spent. As to petty cash, the Board could “set any policy deemed appropriate.”

Less attention was paid in the press to Counsel Zdarsky’s views on the position of the library director. Although state library law specified that the Board has power to hire and establish the salary of the director, the minutes of the meeting reflect Zdarsky’s opinion that “over the years, the library director had become a ‘department head’ and thus a member of the mayor’s cabinet, [and as such is] evaluated annually by the mayor with input from the City Council and Board.”

A holdover issue from the 1950s, the director’s status would again become the center of controversy in the next century when Alderman Michael O’Connor, the third member of the 1993 City Council oversight committee, became mayor in 2005.

The library was in the headlines that May of 1993 for another reason as well. A story in the May 21 issue of the *Berwyn LIFE* had this startling lead-in:

“After years of being short-handed, the Berwyn Library Board had one member too many Monday night. Georgia Nevaril-Lhotka came to Monday’s meeting to find her seat already occupied by new appointee Terry Lanziscero.”

In the waning days of the Lanzillotti administration, 29 appointments to various Berwyn governing boards had been placed before the City Council for approval. Many of the seats had been unoccupied for years. Mrs. Nevaril-Lhotka herself had been serving without portfolio for nearly a year. Her term had expired in April 1992, but she continued to serve in compliance with long-standing Berwyn Library Board tradition and Illinois library law statements indicating that trustees may remain in place until their successors are appointed.

Mrs. Nevaril-Lhotka told those in attendance at that May Board meeting that she never had been informed of her altered status either by mail or telephone. Board President Scola said she had been assured by the mayor that “the letter is in the mail.”

Mayor Lanzillotti had given no reasons when he asked the City Council to concur in Nevaril-Lhotka’s replacement. He later told a *Berwyn LIFE* reporter, “She had been there a long time, and I felt we have a need for change.”

In response, Mrs. Nevaril-Lhotka told the reporter that, despite her 78 years, “I could pull my load as well as younger board members and never missed a meeting in over 30 years.” She attributed her dismissal more to politics than to age, saying she believed it stemmed from a vote she had cast while serving on the School Township 39 Board. She recalled the mayor had asked her to vote to replace the Township 39 treasurer. Instead of complying with the mayor’s request, she cast the deciding vote to retain the treasurer in office.

“A tearful [Mrs. Nevaril-] Lhotka said she thought [her dismissal] was ‘vindictive,’” the *Berwyn LIFE* reported. “Now if they build that library after all these years, I will not be here,” she said. “It really hurts.”

Nevertheless, Mrs. Nevaril-Lhotka was able to continue supporting the building project as a member of the volunteer Committee for a New Berwyn Public Library. And in March 1994, she was welcomed back to the Board, reappointed to fill a vacancy by new Mayor Shaughnessy. There she remained for another 10 years, offering the voice of experience and the guidance of historical perspective gained over 40 years of service.

In that spring of 1993, Mrs. Nevaril-Lhotka was not the only library leader experiencing strained relationships. On June 9, Director Koppe submitted a letter of resignation citing “philosophical differences with the Board.” Although Mrs. Koppe’s letter did not state a reason for her departure, she later told a *Berwyn LIFE* reporter she was “leaving in the best interest of the library.”

“I don’t think I could accomplish as much as in years past with the way the Board is changing things,” Director Koppe said. “I don’t think we have the same philosophy.”

One difference cited by the director involved the upkeep of the library branches. Even though the Board hoped to schedule a November referendum to gain voter approval

to construct a new building, Mrs. Koppe wanted to make sure in the interim that the existing buildings “were still welcoming to patrons.”

Director Koppe cited Board reluctance to replace carpeting at the 34th Street Branch, an expenditure she said already had been approved in the 1993 capital improvement budget.

And then there were those draperies. Board members had objected that the expenditure had not been brought to them for approval and had sought a legal opinion that the Board, not the administrator, controls grant money.

Board President Scola expressed surprise at the resignation. The president described Mrs. Koppe’s feeling that the Board was “unhappy with her” as a “misconception.”

“We were trying to make everything go along with state library law and change things for the better,” President Scola told a reporter. “Some of the practices were there long before she came. We wanted to work with her to make these changes.”

Nevertheless, Director Koppe concluded, “If the library is to go ahead, it is better off without me.”

### **Lofgren Named Director No. 6**

Facing a June 23 effective date for Mrs. Koppe’s departure, the Board voted unanimously that same night to promote Mrs. Gail Lofgren from head of the South Branch Reference Department to acting director at a salary of \$31,285.

The sixth director of the Berwyn Library held a Bachelor of Arts degree in literature from Rosary College in River Forest and was working toward a Master’s Degree in Library Science. After starting out as a page at the Berwyn Library, she had progressed to positions at the Morton High School and Morton College libraries. Since 1984, she had been serving as Berwyn’s reference librarian.

The leadership Director Lofgren provided the library during this critical time would lead the Morton Township Women’s History Month Organization some years later to name her the recipient of its “One Special Woman Award.”

The Board, the new director and community supporters intensified efforts to assure their second attempt at a building referendum would be successful. Their attempts

at building goodwill paid off in increased library usage. An average 350 people passed through the doors of each branch each day during 1993.

More than 50 volunteers of all ages and interests joined the Committee for a New Berwyn Public Library, and spokesmen expressed hope that “the little guys” would be able to win voter approval.

Meticulous in its efforts to assure that no library money was channeled into referendum efforts, the committee engaged in numerous small fundraisers. Alderman Stillo, chairman of the City Council’s library oversight committee, personally helped organize a spaghetti dinner.

Other public leaders lent their voices to the cause.

Democratic Mayor Shaughnessy and Berwyn Republican Township Committeeman Charles Slezak issued a joint communiqué endorsing a new building. Numerous community organizations voiced support, none more vigorously than the Berwyn Development Corp., which voted “overwhelmingly” to endorse the proposed building.

But fierce opposition was organizing under Berwyn resident James Tobin, chairman of National Taxpayers United of Illinois.

Placing the cost of the new library at “16 million with interest, not the \$7.9 million stated in the referendum,” Mr. Tobin in a letter dated October 6 asked Berwyn homeowners for donations of \$25 to \$50 to “help defeat this new attempt to raid your pocketbook.”

In rebuttal, Library Board members pointed out “inaccuracies, untruths and misinformation” in Mr. Tobin’s letter. They disputed his \$26 million figure, noting that Flatland, Thomas and Co., specialists in public finance, computed the total cost of the project as \$7.9 million.

Of 31 letters to the editor published in the *Berwyn LIFE* regarding the referendum, only three expressed opposition. But they held clues to strong underlying negativity.

“North Berwyn will be disenfranchised of a vital asset,” said one letter writer.

“All senior citizens and individuals on fixed incomes should vote no,” said another.

“Destroying part of Janura Park is the worst idea Berwyn politicians have hatched in a very long time,” still another concluded.

On the eve of the election, a *Berwyn LIFE* editorial noted library supporters had learned from the failure of the previous referendum and had addressed the questions that led to its defeat:

“They pressed city officials to place a firm \$200,000 price tag on the recreational facilities that will have to be moved to make room in Janura Park for the new library,” the newspaper noted. “They secured city commitments to use proceeds from the sale of the two existing libraries to reduce the \$31 annual cost of the project to [each] taxpayer.

“Surely,” the editorial concluded, “\$2.58 per month is not too much to pay for a facility educators say can enhance the quality of life for the people of the community and realtors say can add to the value of the buildings in which they live.”

Voters, however, did not follow the newspaper’s advice.

### **“Referendum goes down in flames”**

That headline in the November 5 *Berwyn LIFE* was atop the story detailing that the referendum had been defeated by 795 votes, nearly the same amount as in 1992. Voters cast 3,590 nays and 2,795 ayes in a much smaller turnout than the previous November, when 8,919 nays and 8,142 yeas were recorded.

Some attributed the loss to that low turnout, a result of voter apathy in a nonpresidential election year and a lack of contests in the North and South Berwyn School Board elections.

Others blamed “misinformation” distributed by Mr. Tobin, who rejoiced in claiming that “with little money and only 12 volunteers” his Angry Taxpayers group had succeeded in defeating the referendum.

Still others cited North Berwyn parents, alleging they campaigned against the library referendum out of fear its approval would jeopardize a grade school referendum planned for the following year.

“We are saddened Berwyn voters rejected a sorely needed community resource in the misguided effort to keep their purse strings closed,” said Board President Scola. “The people spoke, and they will have to live with it. They will still have to pay because the

federal government says we have to fix up the existing libraries and make them handicapped accessible.”

The library had received an extension on the deadline for bringing its buildings into compliance with the federal Americans with Disabilities Act. The dispensation had allowed time for resolution through the building referendum. Now facing a January 26, 1994 deadline for making its existing facilities handicapped accessible, the library succeeded in obtaining one more extension.

On March 28, a public hearing was scheduled to discuss the options now open to the Library Board:

- Repairing the heating, plumbing and air-conditioning systems at both branches and making them both handicapped accessible — Estimated cost: \$2.6 million and a 15 percent reduction in space;
- Closing the 34th Street Branch and expanding the 16th Street Branch — Estimated cost: \$3.4 million and a 15 percent reduction in space;
- (And despite doubts voiced by Mrs. Scola about a third try at passing a referendum) Closing both branches and building a new facility in Janura Park with plans pared down to a single story capable of future expansion — Estimated cost: \$3.1 million and a 19 percent increase in space.

Fortunately for the Berwyn Public Library, a new option presented itself.

### **The CSA Solution**

“I think I have the solution to your library problems.”

With those words, Mrs. Vera Wilt, president of CSA Fraternal Life, suggested in a telephone call to Mayor Thomas Shaughnessy that the CSA building at Harlem Avenue and Riverside Drive could be the answer to the Berwyn Library’s space problems. Noting CSA would be moving its corporate headquarters to Oakbrook in the fall of 1994, Mrs. Wilt suggested the hexagonal-shaped insurance building could be retooled for library use. And after touring the building with city and library officials, the mayor declared he was “walking on air.”

Purchase negotiations began, and the only obstacle identified by Alderman Samuel Stillo, chairman of the library's aldermanic oversight committee, was the as-yet undetermined cost of shoring up the floors to support the weight of book stacks.

"If the cost of support columns plus the estimated \$1 million price of the building exceed the cost of a new facility, the CSA purchase would not make sense," Alderman Stillo said. "Otherwise, the CSA building is perfect for a library." Serviced by public transportation on Harlem Avenue, the building had space on site for 50 cars plus the possibility of future access to an undeveloped lot across the street, he noted.

By July, Alderman Stillo was reporting to the Library Board that in his view the weight question had been resolved.

"Preliminary studies by city engineers Frank Novotny and Associates indicate the building's basement would require no alterations to accommodate the weight of 150 pounds per square foot that the state requires for libraries," the *Berwyn LIFE* reported. "First and second floors would require reinforcement; bringing the total cost of acquisition and renovations to an estimated \$2.6 to \$2.7 million."

Alderman Stillo suggested further cost savings might be achieved by reinforcing only the main floor and using the second floor for computers and offices. The result, he said, would be "a far better figure" than the \$3.1 million needed for new construction in Janura Park or the \$3.4 million needed to close the 34th Street Branch and repair and expand the 16th Street location to bring it into ADA compliance. What's more, the alderman said, "No recreation land would be diverted to library use."

Soon library staff and PSA architects were hard at work reconfiguring the building for service as a library. Finally, on November 9, 1994, the City Council exercised its home rule power to incur debt and authorized the mayor to negotiate and execute the purchase of 2701 S. Harlem Avenue at a price not to exceed \$1.75 million. There would be no referendum. Bonds would be issued to cover the purchase.

Despite earlier opposition from two north side aldermen, the vote was unanimous, as reported in the *Berwyn LIFE*:

"Alderman Sal Gambina said he still did not consider the CSA Building to be centrally located for residents of his ward on the city's Northeast side. However, he said, 'If that is what the majority of the Council chooses to do, I vote aye.'

“Alderman Raymond Fron said he hated to see the 16th Street Branch closed because of its convenience for North Berwyn residents. ‘But if you have to choose between all libraries closed [for failure to meet federal standards] or kept open, I vote aye.’

“Mayor Shaughnessy added his vote to that of the eight aldermen to ‘symbolize his support.’”

On January 10, 1995, the purchase was completed. The Council authorized a \$3 million bond issue to cover the \$1.75 million purchase price, \$700,000 in renovations and \$70,000 in architects’ fees. The remaining funds would be used to hire state-mandated consultants, and to cover the cost of issuing bonds and paying interest plus an additional allotment for a feasibility study for a new police station.

The bond issue would be repaid over nine years and was expected to add \$10 to \$15 to the average homeowner’s property tax bill.

Purchase negotiations slowly bore fruit. But delays in completing CSA’s new offices in Oakbrook pushed the closing back to May 24 and then to June 27. Hopes for a September opening for the new library were postponed to late fall or early winter.

### **Grant Aids Reconstruction**

But June brought welcome notification of a \$250,000 state grant for the building’s reconstruction. Finally, on July 12, 1995, a newspaper photograph showed CSA President Wilt turning over the keys to the building to Mayor Shaughnessy, Library Board President Scola and Aldermanic Chairman Stillo.

The following month, the \$713,471 renovation contract was awarded to the lowest of nine bidders, Winterset Construction of Bridgeview.

With the purchase completed, construction funding assured and contractors in place, the Library Board, staff and the Committee for a New Berwyn Public Library shifted focus to raising the \$300,000 needed to furnish the building. Individual donors and community organizations were invited to furnish rooms for work or study, public meetings or children’s activities. Bricks were sold for \$100 each to create a “Pathway to Knowledge” leading to the front door.

There did not appear to be much time for such fundraising. Winterset contractors and Interplan Practice architects presented a construction schedule calling for work to start on September 26, 1995, and be completed in mid-March, 1996. Book collections were to be moved to the new building April 4 through 18 in time for a grand opening on April 19.

In December 1995, Library Board members braved snow and cold to check on progress. Armed with flashlights to inspect those rooms still lacking electric power, they tried out the elevator; inspected the lower level where new steel columns had been added to assure the floors could support the added load of heavy book stacks; and marveled at a building that housed six bathrooms instead of the single unisex facility that currently existed at each branch library. They reveled in the “openness” of a design that had enough space to triple the work area staff members currently had available.

In February 1996, Mayor Shaughnessy again toured the building with library officials to check on the reconstruction, now targeted for a May 28 grand opening.

“That’s my baby!” the mayor proclaimed at tour’s end. He was so proud of the project that he announced the City Council’s next Committee of the Whole meeting would be held in the library “so the aldermen can see how nice it is.”

On February 21, aldermen walked through 20 rooms on three floors, guided by Library Director Lofgren and Project Architect Dennis Cabala and accompanied by a *Berwyn LIFE* newspaper reporter.

“Right now you are in the children’s program area,” Director Lofgren explained at one stop on the tour. “This room is for hands-on crafts, and aldermen ... are standing in the middle of what will be the sink where the children wash up after their projects.”

As the weeks went on, the CSA’s former basement print shop was converted into the library’s Reference Department. The first floor area that once housed the Czechoslovak Heritage Museum now was ready to harbor the Circulation and Children’s Departments as well as Adult Fiction and Readers’ Advisory services.

On April 19, Alderman Stillo introduced a motion asking the City Council to name the building that housed the Berwyn Public Library the “Thomas G. Shaughnessy Center.” Alderman Stillo said his motion was based on a recommendation from the

Library Board, and although the Library Board minutes did not mention such action, the City Council unanimously approved the designation.

With the branch libraries due to shut their doors on April 27, staff members assisted by adult volunteers and local Scout troops held close-out sales of books and furnishings. To further facilitate the move, patrons were asked to check out books between April 22 and 26 and hold them until the new facility opened.

Once again the opening was pushed back, this time to June 3, to await the tardy delivery of doors and hardware and completion of the time-consuming task of merging the collections of two branch libraries into a single facility.

A decade later, retired Administrative Assistant Carol Shotola and current Administrative Assistant Barbara Ziemba still vividly recalled the stress of that move.

“It was May and hotter than blazes,” Mrs. Shotola recalled. “We sat on the floor, working on cardboard boxes because we had no chairs or desks. The boxes contained all the administration files, and it seemed every time you wanted a file it was always in the box you were working on, and you had to take everything off the box in order to get at it.” Mrs. Ziemba had brought a typing table from the former 34th Street Branch so she could pay the library’s bills and keep up with other accounting work, and Mrs. Shotola confessed to coveting that table.

The old heating, ventilating and air conditioning system had not been replaced when the building was purchased, the women recalled, so there was no air conditioning to relieve the heat. Nor was fresh air available since the windows did not open. While the Director and Board lobbied City Hall for the money to replace the HVAC system, the women survived with another Barbara Ziemba idea — small desk fans brought from home.

Administrative office workers did not have the worst of it, the women agreed. Because book collections often had been divided between two buildings, weeding out duplications before the move proved an insurmountable task for the Children’s Reference and Fiction Departments.

“They had to weed the collections and consolidate them as they were shelving them in the new building,” Mrs. Shotola recalled. Pages and volunteers could help shelve books, but only trained staff members could determine what to keep and what to discard.

“It was exhausting work,” she said. “Moving company workers rolled the books in on carts. Then library workers had to quickly unload them because the movers needed the carts for the next load. It was a tough move, but we were so happy to be here that everyone pitched in to help, tired or not.”

### **Thank-you for Donors**

By May 30, the library was ready to hold a thank-you reception and preview tour for donors whose contributions helped furnish the building.

Some items had been hunted down by staff members. Antique theater seats in the audio/visual area were found by Director Lofgren in a shop in Peoria. A full-sized knight in shining armor symbolically protected the library entrance.

But many of the furnishings, and in some cases entire rooms, were underwritten by organizations such as the Berwyn Woman’s Club, Kiwanis Club of Berwyn and Berwyn Masonic Lodge No. 839. Individual patrons also made contributions, and in the case of the late Mr. Ernest Dardwin even made sure through his estate that support for the library would continue after his death.

On entering the building that May evening, each donor received a map guiding them to the individual piece of furniture or entire room equipped through their contributions. Tours culminated in a dedication ceremony at which Mayor Shaughnessy, Alderman Stillo and Director Lofgren were honored for their leadership in obtaining the library’s new home.

Finally on June 10, 1996, the delays were over. Library and city officials gathered on the front steps to cut the ribbon and open the doors on a new chapter in the library’s history. After years on the move and numerous divisions of services, the library possessed a single, central, permanent home.

So many people came to the opening day of the library that Director Lofgren told the *Berwyn LIFE* she feared for a time that all of the 20,000 books patrons had checked out to reduce the burden on the professional movers were about to be returned in a single day. A total of 7,300 materials were returned in the first two days, and library staff processed 150 library cards. A total of 2,500 items were checked out — one-third of the combined monthly average for the library’s former two branches — all within two days.

“We hope every resident will go and see what their tax dollars have achieved,” editorialized the *Berwyn LIFE*. “We certainly believe they got their \$3 million worth and more.”

### **New Chapter on Unity**

Patrons approaching the library via the Pathway to Knowledge walkway found three floors of service waiting for them. With a total of 33,000 square feet, a single floor of the new building was the equivalent of one entire branch in the former dual location system.

Throughout the library there was a feeling of light and openness, an effect Director Lofgren said had been created by removing walls that had divided the building into the small offices required by CSA.

The goal of the staff was to make the library “user friendly,” Director Lofgren said. The ceiling of the Youth Services area depicted a tropical rain forest and contained furniture representing animals of the rain forest. The Young Adults Room had a fireplace and a jukebox containing cassettes.

There was a large meeting room on the second floor available for community use and smaller rooms for patrons needing to use typewriters and computers.

In its March 1997 issue, the *Illinois Municipal Review* applauded the decision by Interplan Practice to save as much of the interior as possible rather than gutting the three-story hexagonal-shaped building. This was accomplished, the review noted, by:

- Creating openings in existing masonry walls to allow different library spaces to flow into one another;
- Locating the Reference Department, which has the heaviest weight loads, on the ground floor to limit additional reinforcement for library stacks on upper levels;
- Keeping the original mechanical and lighting systems;
- Relocating the entrance so that patrons arriving by car in the parking lot behind the building would not have to walk around to the front.

In another tribute, the building was declared a winner in the 1996 Keeping Berwyn Beautiful Contest co-sponsored by the *Berwyn LIFE*, the City of Berwyn and the All Berwyn Committee.

But more than a building, a library is a public service and the new facility had plenty to offer.

Patrons could access library catalog and reference services via computer in appropriate sections throughout the building, and the Children's / Young Adult section also had multimedia computer work stations.

For the first time patrons could be offered access to the Internet through staff intermediaries. Patrons no longer had to make audio/visual selections from a list of titles and then ask to have the videos brought to them by staff members. Now AV materials were on open display for people to peruse.

"We now had a Board Room; a Community Room; a Children's Program Room where people could meet," Mrs. Ziembra recalled. "We used to have to hold programs out in the middle of the floor with people walking in and out."

"We have always had a really nice collection," Director Lofgren said. "But because it was divided between two buildings no one ever really saw it before. Now thanks to a new facility they will."

But as with any new occupancy, there also were problems.

After only six months in the new building, the roof over the Community Room sprang a leak. Blisters were discovered, and the roof was judged to be beyond patching. The City Council allocated \$60,000 for roof replacement in its 1997 capital improvement budget, and the work was completed in October.

January saw a further expansion of services as lap-sit story times were introduced so that parents and children ages 12 to 24 months could share special moments related to reading. Puppets became the newest checkout materials.

"Before we moved into the new building, we averaged about 10,000 to 13,000 books circulated per month," Director Lofgren recalled. "Now our regular monthly circulation is 25,000 to 35,000. In February, we had over 2,000 calls to the Reference Department for information."

By November 1997, the library was asking to increase its 1998 budget by \$200,000 to cover these expanding services. However, the city had a \$1 million deficit and was asking each department to cut budgets rather than increase them.

To pick up the slack, Mrs. Lofgren personally poured salt on the parking lot and cleaned graffiti from the elevator. It was a hands-on tradition harking back to the days when Mrs. Polivka climbed up on the roof to patch the leaks, and Mr. Korbel built shelves for books.