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## Let There Be Light: DeKalb library gets all clear on window project

By Aracely Hernandez - Staff Writer

DeKALB - Modern windows aren't going to hurt the DeKalb Public Library's inclusion in the National Register of Historic Places.

In fact, the new windows with clear glass are what the architect originally intended the library to have when it opened in 1930. The library did get permission from the National Register to put in the new windows, said library Director Dee Coover.

"The glass had aged, and in the 1960s a protective film was put on it for insulation purposes, which further clouded them," she said. "In the 1930s this was designed to have a lot of light."

Jeremy Callahan and Eric Scott, glaziers from DeKalb Contract Glazing, are working on replacing the 56 windows at the library. They started after Thanksgiving and plan on finishing in the next week.

The new aluminum windows cost \$215,500, which came from Tax Increment Financing funds.

Right now the biggest challenge is removing the two 18-by-12-foot windows in the library's main room.

"The steel windows are 77 years old, and they don't come down so easy. They have 2,000 pounds of steel each," Callahan said. "That's a lot of steel."

He said it's rewarding to work on a building he grew up going to.



Workers replace insulation around one of the larger windows at the DeKalb Public Library on Thursday morning. Chronicle photo HOLLY LUNDH

"It's a pretty impressive old building," Callahan said Thursday morning. He looked at the overcast sky through the windows that have already been put in. "Wait until the sun comes out."

Plastic sheets have been placed to cover shelves in the main room while workers from Ornamental Plasterworks of Rochelle replace plaster on the window ledges.

Coover said the architect working with the library, John Gillan of Frye, Gillan, Molinaro Architects of Chicago, feels the library deserves its listing in the National Register of Historic Places. Coover pointed to the Art Deco design of the library, which includes marble pillars and oak doors.

The library was built with funds left by barbed-wire inventor Jacob Haish. Coover said the building will always be a library. It is running out of room, but the library's board is working on finalizing a mission statement saying it will do its best to find alternatives, such as expansion or opening a satellite location.

The library also has received recognition for its work. On Thursday, the DeKalb Chamber of Commerce presented it with an Award of Merit.

This summer the library received a grant from the DeKalb County Community Foundation and the Katz Family Foundation to help with the restoration of a Works Progress Administration mural that hangs above the fireplace. Seventy-one years of dirt and grime were removed.

More recently, John and Nancy Castle assisted the library with funds to move a ceramic wall piece that was created by local artist Helen Merritt in 1967. The Chicago Conservation Center helped move the tiled art from one side of the fiction room - which once served as the children's room - where it was obstructed to a wall where it can be better seen. The Ben Gordon Center Foundation also recently provided the library with funding to create a "self-health center" of books regarding substance abuse and mental health.

Coover said an open house to show off the library's improvements will be held from 4-6:30 p.m. Feb. 14.

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