

# Library Broadens Its Reach, Helps Small Businesses

by Kristen D'Andrea

A valuable resource for Long Island small business owners is about to get even bigger.

Next month, with the completion of a \$14 million expansion project, the Middle Country Public Library (MCPL) in Centereach will open its newest addition, the Miller Business Resource Center. Designed to support regional economic development, the Center will provide technical assistance and research for small businesses, entrepreneurs, and not-for-profit organizations across Long Island.

"I truly think we hit on a real need," said Sandra Feinberg, Library director, who has overseen the Library's Building Project, since its initial planning stages nearly six years ago.

The Miller Center will offer access to extensive business resources, as well as personalized business research and reference assistance. Specialized business librarians will be on hand to help patrons find and interpret industry facts, consumer trends, demographic and statistical profiles, funding sources, and other business intelligence. In addition, the Center will house space for literacy tutoring, business and career counseling, and special collections.

The MCPL has always provided its community members – the nearly 60,000 residents of Selden and Centereach – with a substantial business and finance section, as well as a small career counseling center, Feinberg said. But, back in 1997, when the Library formed a Foundation to assist in expanding its ability to develop and support a number of regional and national initiatives, it was decided that the business research assistance department should receive a separate home all to itself.

"We subscribe to some really great databases," said Luise Weiss, coordinator of adult reference and business services. "One of our databases includes 12

million businesses across the United States. It can be searched by sales, number of employees, Yellow Book categories...you name it. We also have specialized high-tech databases and a ton of demographic information. They all have to be interpreted differently."

Enter the business librarians. Specially-trained business research librarians will staff the Miller Center at all times.

"People call or come in with business-related questions and there are no quick answers. Deciphering these databases is involved," Weiss said.

And, it's valuable. "I was speaking with a man recently who was annoyed because he had paid \$1,000 to a company that provided him with a list—names and addresses of businesses in a specific demographic category. We could have provided that information at our Center," Weiss added.

While priority will go to community members, resources at the Miller Center will be available to the public. "We won't turn anyone away," Feinberg said. "However, down the road, we may need to charge a fee for our services. I'm hoping to get enough government and corporate support, though, so that we won't have to."

In order to sustain its development, the Miller Center has established partnerships with area businesses and organizations. Sponsorships for a variety of services are still available, such as the Center's BIZLINK webpage, which gives users virtual access to online databases filled with current trade and industry surveys, financial and investment tools and the Community Resource Database (CRD) of Long Island. The CRD profiles more than 11,000 regional community services and resources, providing users



Luise Weiss; John DeMartino, VP, marketing, Invision; Lisa Canari, marketing manager, People's Alliance Federal Credit Union; Shirley Singletary, Searchworld Business & Executive/Professional Search Firm; and John Jay LaValle, Supervisor, Town of Brookhaven

with access to current information about health, human service and education agencies and programs located in Nassau and Suffolk counties. The Middle Country Public Library has served as the central manager for the database since its inception in 1989.

As the largest public library on Long Island, the MCPL has been extending its reach beyond its local residents for several years.

MCPL has been designated the national model for the Family Place Libraries Project, an initiative aimed at bringing people from around the country together to focus on children's services in public libraries. As part of Family Place, librarians provide developmentally appropriate programming, books, toys and audiovisuals in a specially designed space for young children and their parents or caregivers.

The library has been recognized at the local, regional and national levels for its leadership in developing these family support services, as well as community coalitions, and collaborative regional and national projects in partnership with Long Island's health, human service and business communities.

"We have developed programs that expanded beyond the scope of our local area and local tax base," Feinberg said.

Of this, the Miller Business Resource Center is another perfect example. □