



Harford County  
Public Library

# NEWS RELEASE

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## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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### **BEL AIR LIBRARY CHILDREN'S DEPARTMENT REOPENS**

*Renovation highlights include a NatureMaker Tree, enhanced technology and reading areas plus a focus on Harford County heritage*

**(Belcamp, Maryland – September 2, 2016)** -- After an extensive four month renovation, the Bel Air Library Children's Department reopened the afternoon of Thursday, September 1, to an enthusiastic response from children and adults alike.

The Children's Department, geared toward those from birth to middle school, features a NatureMaker Tree, an Innovation Lab-type area for middle schoolers plus a town square with a Harford County heritage focus, a reading garden and story time pagoda, tech bar, camp fire, enhanced collections, comfortable reading areas and more.

Research shows that children learn through play. The goal of the Bel Air Library Children's Department renovation was to transform a traditional library space into areas that support and nurture the library's youngest customers.

"More than six years ago a vision was born to create learning and interactive space at the Bel Air Library for children, their families and caregivers," said Mary Hastler, CEO of Harford County Public Library. "It is so gratifying to see the new Children's Department open. The feedback from customers has been very positive."

As library customers enter the Children's Department, the first thing they encounter is 19-foot soaring NatureMaker Steel Art Tree. The oak tree is a work of art, crafted by several sculptors in Carlsbad, Ca., and was hand-painted and hand-finished. The tree goes from floor to ceiling and includes birds, squirrels, a raccoon, an owl, a frog, a butterfly and lichen plus carved initials.

The tree was produced using 75 percent recycled steel and other renewable materials. The bark is odorless and nontoxic, and the water-based paint contains no volatile organic compounds (VOCs).

Another highlight of the renovation is StreamWorks, an extension of the popular Innovation Lab at the Abingdon Library and geared toward middle-school children. It features 3-D printers (including an art 3-D printer), maker space, comfortable seating and gathering areas and more. A tech bar featuring public computers is available in another part of the Children's Department.

The Harford County heritage theme is displayed in town square buildings such as a post office, a general store, and livery and blacksmith. Each area provides interactive play experiences to help little ones learn their colors, sorting and other critical pre-reading skills. Wall decorations include agricultural images such as horses, sheep and cows.

In addition, children and caregivers will be able to "hop aboard" a replica Ma & Pa Railroad and read their way across Harford County.

Other new additions to the Bel Air Library Children's Department include a baby garden with seats for nursing mothers and an area in the middle for babies and parents/caregivers to explore, be read to and play with interactive learning toys.

For toddlers, there is a "pond" for them to explore with age-appropriate toys and interactives surrounded by books for cozy reading time.

Story times will be held in a pagoda and sing-alongs around the camp fire.

Manns Woodward Studios was the architect of the new space. Capital Museum Services were the fabricators, and Library Interiors provided furnishings and shelving.

Sponsors of the Bel Air Library Children's Department include The Morris A. and Clarisse B. Mechanic Foundation, Dixie Construction Company, Inc., Greater Bel Air Community Foundation and The Bel Air Friends of the Harford County Public Library.

Construction on the new space began in April and was completed in August. The original space was built in 1998 during the Bel Air Library renovation. Thousands of children and adults have visited the department over the years, and it is the busiest branch in the 11-library system.

The Children's Department will be open when the Bel Air Library is open. Hours are Mondays and Wednesdays from 10 a.m. to 8 p.m.; Tuesdays and Thursdays from 11 a.m. to 8 p.m.; Fridays and Saturdays from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.; and Sundays (October through April) from 1 to 4 p.m.

Harford County Public Library operates eleven branches located throughout Harford County, Maryland. The library serves over 185,000 registered borrowers of all ages and has an annual circulation of over 3.8 million. Harford County Public Library is committed to connecting people with information and promoting the love of reading within the community.

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*Photo caption #1: Mary Hastler, CEO of Harford County Public Library (center, left) and Alex M. Allman, chairperson of the Harford County Public Library board of trustees (center, right) participate in the September 1 ribbon cutting for the new Bel Air Library Children's Department with Bel Air Mayor Susan Burdette, Harford County Councilman Chad Shrodes, Bel Air Town Administrator Jesse Bane and Delegate Susan McComas. (Photo by Christine Sullivan)*