

Belleville Public Library & Information Center

221 Washington Avenue, Belleville, N.J. 07109
973-450-3434 | reference@bellepl.org



Media Contact:
Chuck O'Donnell
908-789-0700
Chuck@jaffecom.com

Belleville Public Library and Information Center to Use State Funding For Facelift

BELLEVILLE, NJ – Jan. 19, 2022 – The Belleville Public Library and Information Center, a regal building where residents have browsed the stacks and perused the newspaper since it was built in 1910 with donations from industrialist-turned-philanthropist Andrew Carnegie, is getting a facelift.

Interim Library Director Frances Bacardi said \$150,000 in state funding will be used to replace eight monumental windows in the stack room and the reference area – also known as the Carnegie Room.

She imagines sun-splashed spring days when the windows can be opened and fresh air can greet patrons.

The state funding will also be used to replace the library's roof.

Gov. Phil Murphy's office announced Jan. 6 the second round of funding for the Library Construction Bond Act, which will allocate \$37 million of the \$125 million approved overall for technology upgrades, capital improvements and other projects.

The center at 221 Washington Ave. is one of 34 libraries that will receive a check during this round of funding, which comes from the Library Construction Bond passed by New Jersey voters in 2017.

"This funding will allow us to address some much-needed upgrades," Bacardi explained. "The plan is to select replacement windows that match the windows in the hallway. We are bringing the two parts of the building together – the modern, clean lines of the outside room and the classic look of the Carnegie and stacks rooms."

The library was built with a \$20,000 grant from the Carnegie Corporation, but it has undergone several changes and seen various additions over the past 111 years. The most notable changes came in the early 1990s, spearheaded by late library trustee James J. Cozzarelli Jr.

To bring Cozzarelli's bold vision to life, the library commissioned a series of epic paintings of winged stallions, ferocious dragons and daring heroes for the Carnegie Room's ceiling. In totality, they tell the tale of one man's search for wisdom.

When Carnegie was financing the construction of more than 1,600 libraries in the United States and hundreds more in other countries, no one could have foreseen the evolution of the library from repository of yellowed volumes to resource center and programming hub.

With the bronze lions remaining ever vigilant outside its front doors, the Belleville Public Library offers a wide array of programs ranging from classes for English language learners to chess clubs for teens to parachute play for preschoolers. Patrons come every day to borrow the library's laptops and make use of its printers.

"The Belleville Public Library and Information Center is in many ways the heart of the community," said Renato Peralta, president of the library's Board of Trustees. "We prioritize meeting the needs of the residents, which means capital improvements aren't always possible. This state funding will help us continue to serve the community and continue to make the library a vibrant and vital part of the lives of the people of Belleville."

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