

Western Addition Library, and 16,000-Volume Japanese Language Collection, Reopens

By KENJI G. TAGUMA
Nichi Bei Times
With the Feb. 2 reopening of the Western Addition branch of the San Francisco Public Library, the largest public Japanese-language collection in Northern California is once again accessible.

Located at 1550 Scott St. at Post Street — a stone's throw from Japantown — the Western Addition Branch Library boasts a 16,000-volume collection of Japanese-language materials. While the library was being renovated, the collection was partially scattered at the Presidio branch.

At the reopening, retired librarian Hiroshi Kashiwagi was honored for developing the Japanese language collection. Started in June 1966, the special collection was the only one of its kind on the West Coast for many years. It has served the local Japanese-reading patrons as well those from out of town.

With its \$4.3 million renovation — which took place after the library closed on Aug. 19, 2006 — the newly-reopened branch becomes the latest to receive a facelift under the city's Branch Library Improvement Program (BLIP). It is the seventh of 24 branches to receive a makeover.

Much of the work on the 8,000-square-foot building sought to make the branch ADA accessible and seismically retrofitted. Moreover, the collection itself was updated and expanded, with a new designated "Teen Area," new community room with built-in audio-visual equipment for library programs and a new secure landscaped garden.

The collections and physical structure were not the only elements updated. The library also took advantage of technological advancements, growing from six computers before the renovation to the current 23. There are also 12 laptop computers for public computer classes, as well as wireless (Wi-Fi) access to the Internet and self-service express checkout machines.

The self-checkout machines free up branch staff to help library visitors.

'Community-Building'

According to City Librarian Luis Herrera, libraries are about "community-building."

"It really does bring people together," said Herrera, noting the hundreds of patrons who turned up for the grand reopening, despite the rain.

According to Japanese Collection Librarian Chieko Yamaguchi Wealand, the Japanese-language material expanded "a little bit" with the remodel, mostly in the areas of DVDs, popular fiction and fiction.

Yamaguchi Wealand, who has been with the library for six years, hopes to incorporate more programming in the future. In its previous incarnation, the branch hosted *ikebana*, *sushi* and Japanese calligraphy programs.

She looks to take advantage of the new set of computers by hosting Japanese language computer classes for seniors.

Many Japanese-speaking patrons, Yamaguchi Wealand noted, drive to the library from out of town — including one who was coming to the branch every weekend from San Mateo.

"They don't have Japanese collections at their local branches," she explained. "When they come here, they borrow 20 to 30 books."

Humble Beginnings

The Japanese language collec-



WESTERN ADDITION BRANCH LIBRARY REOPENS — (L-R) San Francisco Supervisor Ross Mirkarimi, state Assemblyman Mark Leno, state Senator Carole Migden, Friends of the San Francisco Public Library Executive Director Donna Bero, City Librarian Luis Herrera and San Francisco Mayor Gavin Newsom cut the ribbon Feb. 2 to the newly renovated Western Addition Branch Library. photo courtesy of SF Public Library

tion was a labor of love for Hiroshi Kashiwagi, who after two years in the literature department of the main library was appointed as the second branch manager of the Western Addition library. He served as branch manager from 1968 to 1970.

"The Japanese Collection was started in 1966 at the Main Library but two years later when I became manager of the Western Addition Branch, the collection was transferred here where it was more accessible to the Japanese-reading patrons," Kashiwagi said.

"When I was hired, they asked me to start it," Kashiwagi said of the Japanese collection. "I had to kind of familiarize myself to the Japanese authors."

Kashiwagi, a *Nisei* who learned the language through Japanese school and his bachelor's degree in Asian languages at UCLA, ordered the books himself from Japan after reading reviews or listening to the suggestions of patrons.

"At first, they sent it by ships, so sometimes it took months [to get books]," recalled Kashiwagi.

After a while, the Kinokuniya Bookstore opened in nearby Japantown — less than four blocks away — dramatically affecting the turnaround time. "We could go there to look at books," he said.

"The collection took off beyond our imagination; its circulation soon accounted for half or more of the branch circulation and it was funded accordingly," Kashiwagi recalled in a speech at the reopening. "The word of the collection spread. San Francisco Public Library was the only library on the Pacific Coast to have this unique collection and we began to have patrons from out of town, some of whom came by Greyhound bus every three weeks."

With the books in place, the

Friends of the Japanese Collection would raise money to sponsor programs, and even invite Japanese authors to speak.

Groups such as the Nikkei Lions Club would donate subscriptions to Japanese magazines, Kashiwagi said.

"Those who used the collection really appreciated it," he said.

Kashiwagi's involvement with the collection didn't stop after he was transferred out of the branch. He would spend half a day each week for 10 years helping to catalog the books.

Kashiwagi retired as a librarian 20 years ago after a 20-year career.

"My successors are the ones who should be credited for the maintenance and growth of the collection," he said. "I'd like to mention especially the contribution of Mrs. Sonoe Jitodai, who served here for many years before her retirement."

In fact, he's still intricately involved with the collection through the renovation, helping to raise some \$15,000 from the Japanese American community for the branch's new furnishings — including shelving, tables and chairs.

His participation is not unnoticed, as a plaque bearing "Japanese Collection in Honor of Hiroshi Kashiwagi" is set to be permanently placed on one of the shelves.

The Western Addition Branch Library is located at 1550 Scott St. between Geary and Post. Linda Suzuki is the branch manager and Chieko Yamaguchi Wealand is the Japanese Collection librarian. Hours are 1 to 5 p.m. on Sundays, 1 to 9 p.m. on Mondays and Wednesdays, 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. on Tuesdays and Thursdays, 1 to 6 p.m. on Fridays, and 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. on Saturdays. For more info, call (415) 355-5727 or visit www.sfpl.org.



JAPANTOWN-AREA LIBRARY REOPENS — Chieko Yamaguchi Wealand (above), who oversees the 16,000-volume Japanese language collection.

LEFT: A patron tries out the branch's new self-checkout on the first day of the renewed library.

BELOW: Children access new computers. photos by Kenji G. Taguma/Nichi Bei Times



FRIEND OF THE LIBRARY — Hiroshi Kashiwagi (R), the former Western Addition branch manager who started the Japanese Collection.

file photo



RENEWED INSIDE AND OUT — The recently renovated Western Addition Branch Library (above and left). photos courtesy San Francisco Public Library