Small Libraries Create Smart Spaces

CASE STUDY

Cornwall Public Library

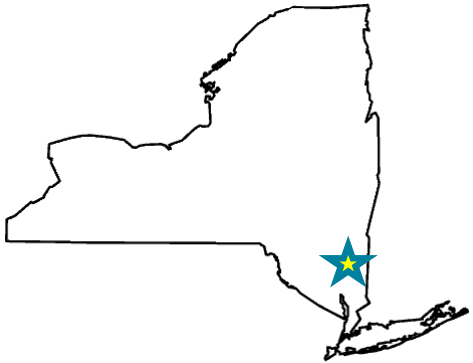
Cornwall, New York

The Community

Every community is unique

Cornwall, New York

- **Service population:** 12,646
- **Location:** Hudson River valley, 50 miles north of New York City
- **Library website:** cornwallpubliclibrary.org/
- Boasts a rich Revolutionary War history



Early spring in Cornwall NY; photo by B. Gutsche

Cornwall's rural quaintness and small-town allure combined with its pastoral setting of parks, riverfront, mountains, and evergreen forests contributed to its reputation as a health retreat in the mid-19th century.

Before the Changes

Small libraries can create Smart Spaces

“Lighter, Quicker, Cheaper” is a placemaking phrase to describe simple, near-term, and low-cost solutions that start to address more complex challenges.

Project for Public Spaces
https://www.pps.org/article/lighter-quicker-cheaper

Meet Mary Lou Carolan

Carolan is a big proponent of the placemaking principle "Lighter, Quicker, Cheaper."

Cornwall Library is in a highly taxed district, which is a great concern to a lot of their constituents. As library director, Carolan is always looking for ways to improve and revamp library space without impacting their annual operating budget. The Smart Spaces grant was the perfect opportunity.

> "Our unique challenge is to continue to serve our population well, with limited space and a static tax base."

The library is well-used by all ages of community members. The linear layout means space is limited and needs to be used flexibly. At least it has good natural lighting.

It's a busy library, as library members line up at the circulation desk.

The kids' corner is colorful and cozy.

The lighting is nice but the building is long and linear.

Engage & Explore

Engaging community members in visioning and planning

Seeking Community Input

Library staff used information gathered from Strategic Plan Focus Groups, as well as informal meetings with their teen advisory group and board members, to formulate ideas for reconfiguring existing space for active learning.

“We were looking for ways to repurpose space, rather than expanding—this is truly what we need,” said Carolan.

In appreciation of the discovery process, Carolan continued, “It seems obvious to engage the community in what you’re doing, but we don’t always practice it.”

Conversations with the Cornwall community

Purpose Statement

Create a space that can be transitioned throughout the day for different audiences and activities for the most flexible use of the floor plan.

Prepare for Change

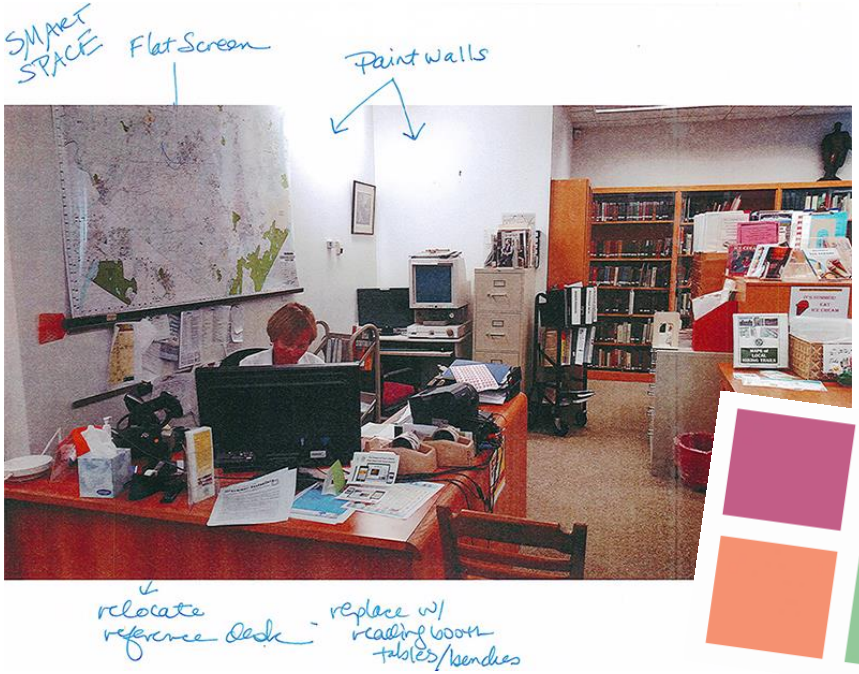
Making way for transformation

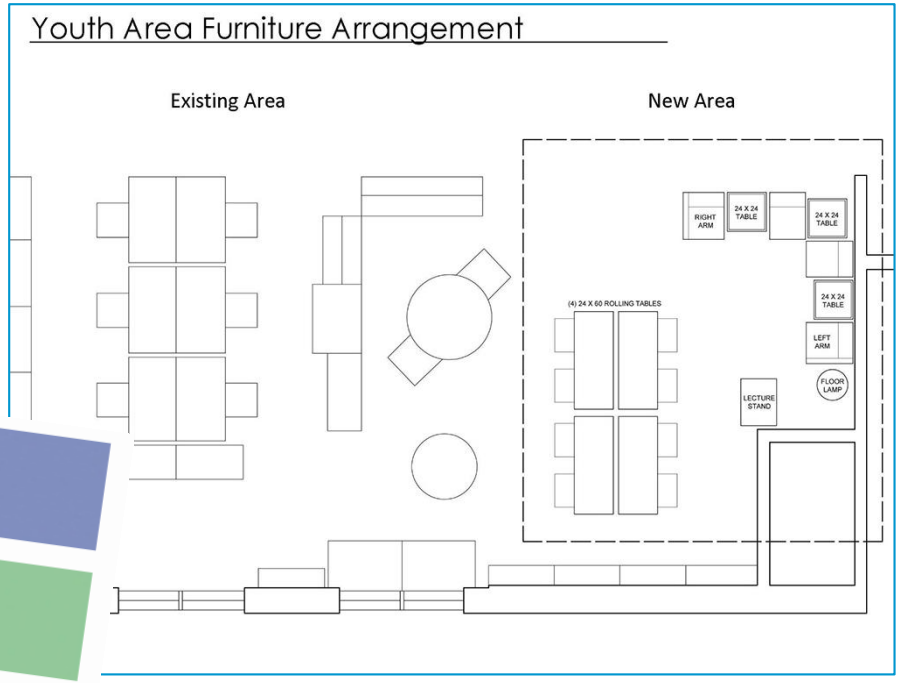
Areas of Focus

Teens in the community expressed their wish for a space that felt more like their own, more of a “place” rather than being sandwiched between the children’s corner and a passageway.

Library staff chose the area occupied by the reference desk because it was in a corner suitable for creating a “living room feel” but still very visible to the front desk.

A local design firm helped library staff re-envision conversion of the reference desk space into an inviting teen place, including livening it up with color—all pro bono.





The new Smart Space will be multi-purpose, offering comfortable seating and reading for seniors, technology training, and flexible learning space for a variety of patrons.

But from 3:00 p.m. on,
the space belongs to the teens.

Transform

Make it happen!

Cornwall Public Library's Smart Space is truly built by its community. This is a story of community members who stepped up to volunteer their skills and expertise.

Even if they weren't regular users of the library, they believe in its value to their community.

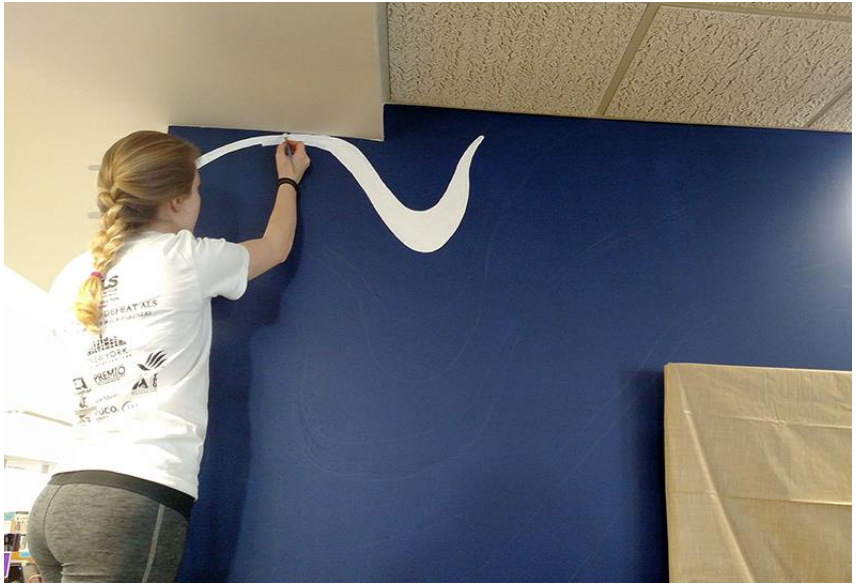
It started with the creativity and enthusiasm of a local design firm.

Designer Jaymee tries out colors and carpet samples as the old furnishing get packed up and moved out.

Furnishings were chosen for flexibility and movability, with data and electrical hookups in the comfy chairs.

The colors are both vibrant and calming, with the deep blue walls clearly defining the cozy corner.

Then two talented sisters were inspired to paint a mural.



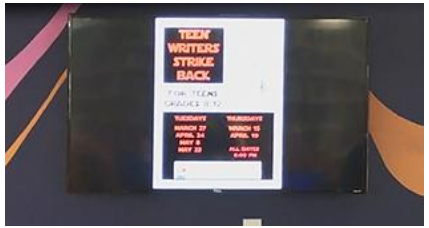
The first bold stroke goes on and there's no turning back now.

Taking a break, with many more swooshes to go.

New Carpeting

A carpet layer made a three-hour round-trip commute on a Sunday (his one day off) to install the carpet because "… libraries have been good to me in my life."

Lighting, Wiring and Electronics

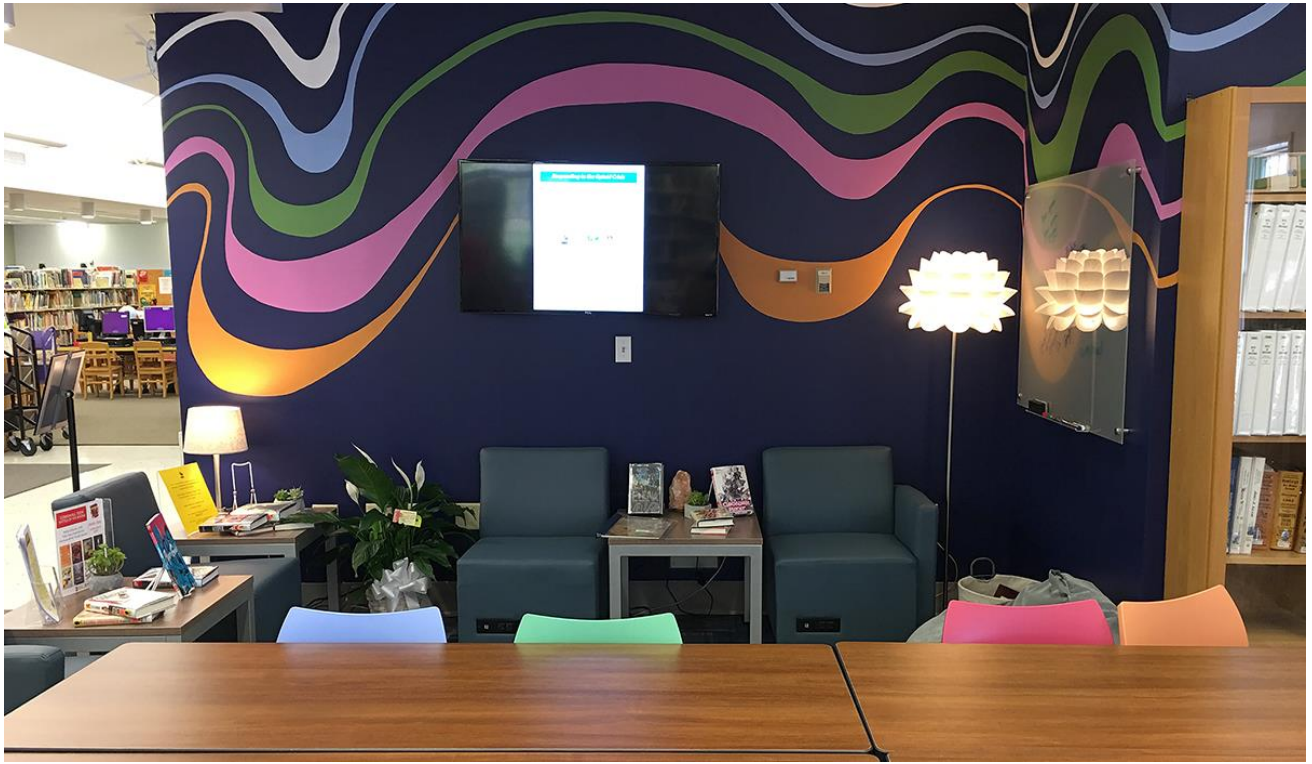


Electrician Andy installed the lights, hung and wired the monitor, and ran data and electrical hook-ups to the "plug-in" seating.

The Finished Space – Ready for Action

"The community really made the space come alive. They fanned the flames. Now they have ownership."

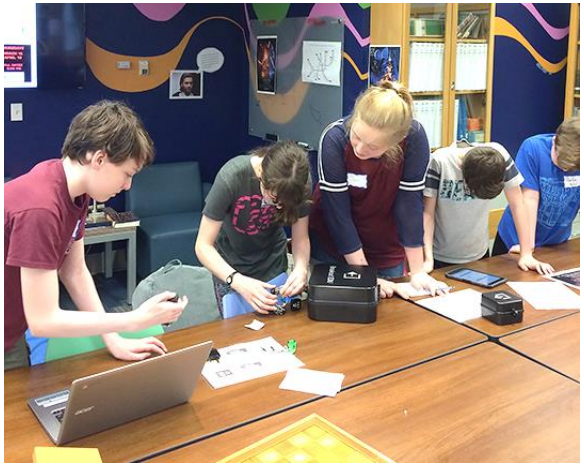
—Mary Lou Carolan



Learn

Activate the space with people and programming

Community teens know how to activate the Smart Space



STAR WARS DAY: Attack of the Locks!

On May 4, two groups of teens were presented with the scenario that an essential piece of a Droid's motor was misplaced and they had to fix it. The teens used their observation skills, logic, and word play to solve the puzzles, unlock the codes, and Breakout of the Box!

Settling in for the weekday afternoon study group

A Place for Meaningful Connection

On April 20, 2018, a group of Cornwall students went to the library's new Smart Space to make signs and write letters for National Walkout Day. After the protest, they came back to the space to talk and debrief about their experience. They all wrote their names on the whiteboard on the wall to commemorate the moment.

It was a whole day of being validated by their library. Powerful.

"The community is the heart of the library.
They are the experts.
They know what they want.
Ask them, then listen to them, trust
and absorb their thoughts.
They are the best compass for change
you can have."

Mary Lou Carolan

For more information on how Small Libraries Create Smart Spaces and more case studies please visit **oc.lc/SmartSpaces.**

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