

# Library Showcase:

## DeKalb County (GA) Public Library, Toco Hill Branch – Interview with Darro Wiley

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*Date Completed: March 11, 2011*

### LOCATION ADDRESS

DeKalb County Public Library Toco Hill/Avis G. Williams Branch  
 1282 McConnell Drive  
 Decatur, GA 30033

### PROJECT INTRODUCTION

DeKalb County (Ga.) Public Library, Toco Hill/Avis G. Williams Branch offer patrons numerous computer training spaces, study rooms and a large lecture hall (100-seat capacity).

Darro Wiley, the director of the library during the construction, answered the following questions about the new library.

**Please describe the space planning and design process of the DeKalb County Public Library Toco Hill Branch (how was the design/layout of the branch chosen, what influenced the technology choices made, etc.).**

The first step in the planning process was the development of a system-wide Library Facilities Plan in 2005 which formed the basis of the projects proposed in the 2006 Bond program. This was followed by the development of a written library building program outlining in detail building space requirements

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-4666-4739-8.ch014

and providing a functional basis for the building design. Both the Facilities Plan and the written building program were developed in-house, because I had had extensive previous library building experience, serving in fact, as a consultant to other library systems on the planning, design, and construction of library buildings for over 20 years.

The plan and building program both set forth the requirement that the existing 9,800 square foot Toco Hill-Avis G. Williams Branch Library be replaced on the existing site by an 18,000 square foot branch. Normally effective building of public library facilities will place them in highly visible locations along major roads, the existing site, while somewhat secluded was judged suitable because it had been well established as the location for the existing Toco Hill branch since the 1960's, and the surrounding wooded landscape (unusual for urbanized East DeKalb) was considered a plus. This decision directly affected many of the design solutions.

Two primary directives to the design team were to minimize the impact of parking requirements on the surrounding wooded areas, and in order to take advantage of those wooded surroundings, the maximum possible use of windows was requested. In fact, floor to ceiling windows were specifically requested on the north, south and east sides of the proposed building. These parameters drove much of the building design, and the design team came up with some innovative solutions – placing much of the parking under the building and developing an open floor plan which allowed the outside surroundings to dramatically permeate the interior.

Although not obvious to the casual observer, the architect envisioned the floor plan as representative of a Zen garden, with the various service features (reference desk, computer lab, public computer area, and children's seating area) suggesting the stones sitting among raked sand (book shelving ranges). This is somewhat apparent when viewing the floor plan on paper.

Technology choices (increase in computer workstations, computer lab, self-checkout stations) were an outgrowth of the goals set forth in the DeKalb County Public Library Strategic Plan.

#### **Did patron needs fit into the planning/design process?**

Patron needs drove the process. Patron input was gathered during both the Strategic Plan and Facilities Plan processes. Also, community input was solicited early in the design process by the library staff and the design firm.

#### **How did technology use influence the space planning at the DeKalb County Public Library's Toco Hill Branch? (i.e. had patrons demanded more technology choices at other branches and/or was technology use at the other branches analyzed?)**

See comment above about community input in the strategic planning process. Also, experience in existing branches made it clear that a substantial increase in the number of computer workstations was required to minimize long customer wait times for computer access. The library system also had previous experience with customer demand for computer training opportunities.

#### **What has been the patron reaction to the Toco Hill Branch?**

Uniformly positive.

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