



NEWS

Newport Beach Library fans hail opening of Witte Hall, an effort to go 'Beyond Books'



The interior of the newly completed Witte Hall at Newport Beach's Central Library. (Susan Hoffman)

By Susan Hoffman

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The wait is over for Newport Beach residents who've been looking forward to setting foot inside the new, \$23.4-million Witte Hall at the

city's Central Library, a facility several years in the making.

The multi-day grand opening of Witte Hall began Thursday with an official ribbon-cutting ceremony led by Mayor Lauren Kleiman and her City Council colleagues, followed by a public viewing.

An invitation-only celebration hosted by the Library Foundation of Newport Beach for major donors and community leaders is planned for Friday night, and on Saturday the Library and Recreation and Senior Services will host free activities for kids and adults, including self-guided tours.

The Library Foundation of Newport Beach, along with the city itself and a host of private donors contributed to the cost of the structure, which will provide the community with educational, cultural, literary and artistic programming. The 10,000-square-foot auditorium is named in honor of Bill Witte and Keiko Sakamoto, who donated \$4 million toward its construction.

Designed by firm Robert R. Coffee Architect + Associates, the auditorium features a curved roof inspired by the seashells found along the city's beaches. Construction [started in February 2024](#); during a ground-breaking ceremony held then, Dave Webb, the city's director of public works, described the project as the next "jewel" in the city's civic crown.

Newport Beach's recreation and senior services department will manage the new facility, which will be available for community organizations, musical programs, conferences, lectures and films. The new structure embodies the concept of "Beyond Books," a slogan created by the Library Foundation.

"Library's are no longer a collection of books, they are community gathering places in which people go to learn, to share and have community," said Jerold Kappel, the foundation's chief executive. "The idea of the 'Beyond Books' concept...is as a community gathering place of lifelong learning."

The Central Library's existing multipurpose room, which has a maximum capacity of 180, has served the community faithfully, but on a somewhat limited basis. Kappel explained audience members had trouble seeing people speaking at the dais, since the seating was all one level, and the acoustics were not beneficial to certain programs.



Jerold Kappel, chief executive of the Library Foundation of Newport Beach, stand in front of the newly completed Witte Hall community auditorium. (Susan Hoffman)

“We continue to use the multipurpose room for three different lecture series: ‘Medicine In Our Backyard,’ a medical lecture series, financial workshops and book discussions,” Kappel said. “Now, with the nearby Edwards Cinema closing, there is a demand for an auditorium.”

Witte Hall, by capacity, has a seating capacity of 300. The new auditorium will provide a valuable resource across subjects and programming types, Kappel said.

He further pointed out that, along with the acoustically beautiful sound system, state-of-the-art technology and three livestream cameras, there are also assistive listening devices for people in need of such accommodations.

Grand opening schedule for the public

On Saturday, the Newport Beach Public Library will hold two free public events to mark the opening of Witte Hall. From 2 to 4 p.m., the Library and Recreation and Senior Services Open House takes place in the Stahr Courtyard with self-guided tours of the auditorium.

There will be face painting, balloon twisting, magic shows, hands-on art activities, a butterfly garden experience and music. There will also be a special reading with Councilmember Robyn Grant and Newport Beach Animal Shelter's resident mascot, Officer Bubbles, as well as a performance by Newport Beach Theatre Arts. Families can sign up for the Summer Reading Program and explore other community resources.

At 7 p.m. Saturday, the library hosts "Meet the Author" presentation with surf legend and former world champion Shaun Tomson. The lecture is over-registered, but a waitlist is available at

[NewportBeachLibrary.org](https://www.newportbeachlibrary.org)

On Sunday at 3 p.m., a Grand Opening Sunday Musicale Concert will be held, featuring a cello quartet comprising Wonsun Keem, In Hee Na, Crystal Soo-Jung and Andy Su. This will be the first musical performance in the acoustically engineered hall.

Susan Hoffman

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