

Children's Library permanently closing

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Drayton Valley's Rotary Children's Library is to close permanently at the end of the year. The library board voted unanimously in favour of the move at its meeting last Thursday.

The official closure date is Dec. 31. Library Director Doug Whistance-Smith says that day was chosen as it coincides with the end of the library's fiscal year. It also allows time to find storage space for a large part of the Rotary Library's collection that there will not be room for in the main branch.

The Rotary Library has been closed to the public since March, but staff have continued to use the space to deliver online children's

programming.

The decision comes at a time when the library board is looking at anticipated reductions in the funding it receives from the Town of Drayton Valley and Brazeau County as both municipalities look to reduce spending.

"Covid may have been the catalyst, but it was definitely not the cause. What was already a very difficult economic situation became even more so," says Whistance-Smith. "The only way we could make that up was by closing the Rotary and drastically remodelling our service plan, including a reduction in staffing."

"We have tried our best to make it work but the reality of the situation is that we just can't sustain it. And when I say

we I don't just mean the library board and staff, I mean everyone, the municipalities and the community."

The Rotary Children's Library opened in 2009 and is located immediately adjacent to Holy Trinity Academy. Whistance-Smith says he believes there is interest from the school in moving into the space, but any decision on such a move would be up to Town and the Saint Thomas Aquinas School Division.

In recent months the library board has been looking at combining the Children's Library and the main library into a single facility. Such a move would reduce costs in the long run and has the potential to improve service levels for library patrons. The former United Church has been offered for sale to Brazeau

County with a view to its being converted to a new library, while the library board itself has favoured a move to the old Sears building in downtown Drayton Valley. Whistance-Smith says he believes the board would be open to other suggestions of vacant space in the community, although it would have to meet certain criteria.

"We need at least 7,500 square feet to accommodate both collections and to allow for people to be able to move around properly," he says. "It really has to be on one level and the space needs to be open. It also needs to be somewhere that's centrally located."

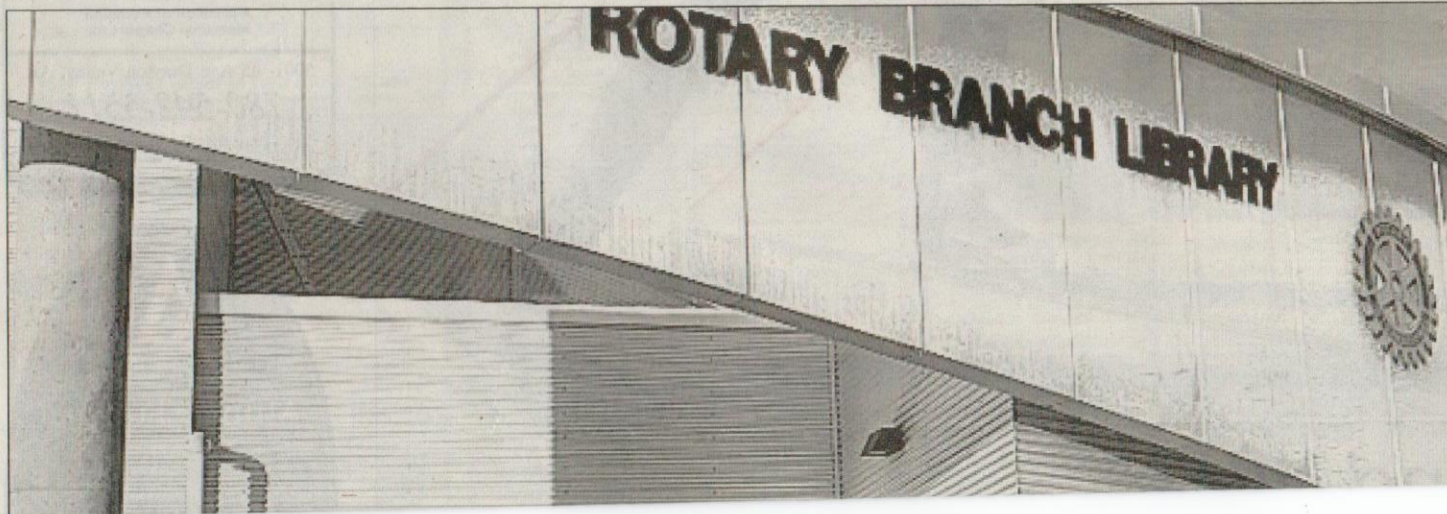
Any move would have to be funded by one or both of the municipalities. Meanwhile, in the current climate of uncertainty, much of the

collection from the Rotary Library will be put in temporary storage.

"We'll do our best to keep the things that are popular out and available," says Whistance-Smith. "But there is no way we could move everything from the Rotary into (the main branch) and have room to move."

Along with closing the Rotary Children's Library, there will be a slight reduction in operating hours at the main library. That includes earlier closing on Thursdays and later opening on Mondays as well as closing the library on the Saturdays of long weekends.

"We'll see how that plays out ... we can modify as things go on," says Whistance-Smith.



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Photo Graham Long