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PROVIDENCE | THE LIBRARY BRANCHES OUT

A NEW CHAPTER



THE PROVIDENCE JOURNAL / STEVE SZYDLOWSKI

Dennis Delsignore, of Stoneblossom Floral and Events, places cherry branches into an urn that will be a centerpiece for an event at the Providence Public Library. After renovations, the library will be available for rental for weddings and other functions.

Weddings, other events to be held there

By TATIANA PINA
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PROVIDENCE — Picture a bride and groom and their wedding party walking up marble steps past mahogany doors and down a mosaic corridor to a sunny hall with an indoor garden.

Trustees from the Providence Public Library want the public to imagine that and many other possibilities now that they are opening the doors of the 111-year-old, Renaissance-style library for rent.

The library has forged a partnership with Russell Morin Hospitality Solutions of Attleboro and Newport to set up events and provide the catering.

On Friday, the library will formally announce its plans, as well as a fundraising campaign to pay for a \$4-million renovation to get the library ready for the new venture. The target date for completion is early December.

Why not invite the public to celebrate big events inside a Rhode Island treasure, said library director Dale Thompson, adding that the Boston Public Library and New York Public Library already have similar ventures.

“We have been looking for a facility in the center of Providence for probably five years,” said Russell Morin, “with numerous requests from people who don’t want to be in a hotel or convention center. This is just like a godsend.”

“Nobody is going to come to Providence to be in a hotel. Providence has a lot to offer. This really fills that destination-wedding need. Brides now

don’t want hotel weddings. They want venues with character.”

“It was VFWs or Knights of Columbus halls when I was growing up,” he said. “That’s where the weddings were. Now nobody goes to those kinds of places,” Morin said. “In the mid-’90s people started looking for unique venues like Blithewold mansion, Glen Manor and Roger Williams Park Casino.”

“We think this is an amazing amount of opportunity at the library. I see local, corporate, convention business, even small proms, gala hospital fundraisers,” he said.

Morin said that although he does not expect it in the first couple of years, he is hoping the venture will eventually ring up \$1 million a year in rentals.



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The library’s grand space could make it a destination wedding site, says an events planner.

Tracey Becker, director of planning and marketing for Bliss Publications, planned a “reveal” party for the latest edition of Bliss Celebrations magazine at the library’s Grand Hall Thursday night.

The hall is encircled by an arched arcade supported by columns. The vertical flutes draw the eye upward to the intricate capitals, ornamented with scrolls and acanthus leaves. The 1,225-squarefoot hall has an artisan-tile floor and a 30-foot, coffered ceiling. A sweetheart stairwell takes guests down to where the library will build its indoor garden.

The party, which was expected to draw event planners, lighting specialists, entertainment people, videographers and others, will help spread the word about the library, Becker said.

The library’s restoration plan calls for long-deferred improvements that include replacing the heating, ventilation and air-conditioning system and installation of a sprinkler system.

Among the spaces that will be renovated are the grand marble staircase and Grand Hall, plus the Ship Room, a 1,978-square-foot meeting room that features antique bookcases, 30-foot ceilings and large light-diffusing windows. Renovations are also planned for the library’s 300-seat auditorium and the trustees’ room. The library has received a \$673,000 grant from the Champlin Foundations toward the work.

Tonia Mason, spokeswoman for the library, said most events will probably be held when the library is closed in the evening or on weekends. Doors and separations are being installed to muffle sound when events occur and there are people using the library for its traditional purposes.

James Bennett, the city’s director of economic development, said the library’s new venture is “very good news.”

“We look forward to what lies ahead, for this city treasure,” Bennett said.

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DESIGNLAB ARCHITECTS

An artist’s rendering of planned renovations to the Grand Hall of the Providence Public Library. The library is starting a \$4-million fundraising campaign to renovate various rooms to get ready for the new venture.



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The trustees’ room is one of the spaces that will be renovated. The library has received a \$673,000 grant from the Champlin Foundations toward the work.