

New Facility Updates Appellate Division Law Library *from the '50s to the* 21st Century

by David Voisinnet

In 1995, after years of trying to deal with inadequate space and an unsympathetic governing body, the Appellate Division Fourth Department was able to get state legislation passed to authorize and fund a new dedicated facility. This was the most exciting news possible after 35 years in a 1950s-designed multicourt monstrosity.

Site availability and local and state politics played a large role in determining the location, shape and design of our new home. In the end, a local developer renovated an existing six-story historic office tower and added a modern two-story wing. The tower would house the court and library offices while the new space would be designed to hold two courtrooms and most of the library's public areas.

The library director and his staff were actively involved throughout the building program, site selection and design phases. The developer chose the architectural firm without input from the courts. State and court architects, however, had substantial input on the project and final sign-off authority. All the architects generally deferred to the library's building program and design concerns. Late in the process, library building consultant Aaron Cohen was brought in to assist in the stack and service counter layout and design. The local architectural firm and state facilities personnel provided professional interior design assistance. Medium stained oak furniture in "arts-and-craft" style was used throughout the library, with a color palette of greens and earth tones. Mahogany and anigre woods were used in the courtrooms and judicial chambers.

The nature of the institution played a large role in shaping the final design of the new complex. In a large metropolitan area without a law school, the Appellate Division Library had grown into one of the

largest court libraries in the state, with research level collections in excess of 250,000 volumes. At the same time, a staff of only eight librarians and clerks with only vague promises of additional new positions managed the library. It was determined that the new facility should have only one primary service counter, with as horizontal a design as possible.

All library public space was built to handle weight loads of 300 pounds per square foot, allowing us to make heavy use of compact shelving (approximately 40 percent), with the ability to convert more in the future. The new 50,000-square-foot, two-story design — which includes two basement storage rooms — doubled the library's collection capacity and public and staff areas, while increasing the library's total

wing. The library's share of the FFE money was approximately \$1.6 million, half of which went for the new shelving.

The most stressful part of the whole project was the actual move and setup in the new facility. The old building's lack of loading docks and adequate elevators limited moving to nights and weekends. The professional movers, American Interfile, conducted yeomen work during this difficult process, including building temporary ramps to move 40 percent of the collection from an elevator-less mezzanine. The move stretched out over a three-month period because of delays caused by the shelving company, Spacesaver, missing its delivery and setup deadline. The library was closed to the public for only 2 1/2 weeks. The library staff was stretched to the limit as we simultaneously coordinated the move at night and remained open for service during the day, while large portions of the collection were inaccessible.

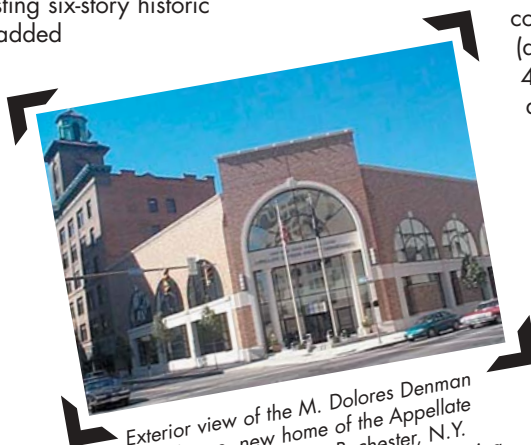
The weeks, months and years of hard work and planning were well worth the effort. The new library, the fourth home in our 150-plus year existence, is a first-rate facility. It contains innumerable features

lacking in our last structure,

including six discussion rooms, a video room, multimedia room, rare book room, computer training lab, book security system, and adequate network wiring and electrical outlets. Our favorite architectural feature is a dazzling 50-foot-high atrium abutting the atrium of the existing tower.

The new Appellate Division Library is truly a wonderful 21st century research facility, making it a pleasurable place to both work and study.

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Exterior view of the M. Dolores Denman Courthouse, new home of the Appellate Division Law Library in Rochester, N.Y. The library occupies most of the new wing (foreground) and first floor of the attached historic tower (rear/left).

size by just 15,000 square feet compared to the former location.

Construction on the complex commenced in the spring of 1997. Work continued throughout the mild (for Rochester!) winter of 1997-98, which allowed for an early opening on Nov. 30, 1998. The construction budget for the project was approximately \$13 million, not including \$3.7 million of bonded state money for furniture, fixtures and equipment (FFE), or the cost of land acquisition for the new



The 50-foot-high atrium is the heart of the new wing, with carrels housing the library's indexes and a freestanding staircase connecting the two floors. For additional photos of the new appellate library building, please visit its Web site at <http://www.courts.state.ny.us/ad4/>.