

## community **service**

**Maureen Arndt**, owner and chief architect of 720 Design, says libraries should be customized to fit the communities they serve

By Sally Deering

**W**HILE GROWING UP IN CHESTERTON, INDIANA, MAUREEN Arndt attended a summer camp on architecture. Although she was only a fourth grader, the course—which was taught by a local librarian—sparked Arndt’s lifelong fascination with both the Victorian architecture of her small town and the structural design of community libraries. This early experience helped shape Arndt’s architectural career, and introduced her to what would become her architectural specialty: library design.

In December 2007, Arndt opened the Dallas, Texas-based architectural firm 720 Design (named for the Dewey Decimal number for architecture). Since then, she has designed libraries in Texas, Oklahoma, Louisiana, and Georgia. Each project represents her belief that a library should be a community resource, and should reflect the culture of the neighborhood it serves.

Though each of her projects is different, Arndt incorporates certain elements in most every library she designs. She creates bright and colorful reading areas for children; quiet sitting rooms for traditional visits from seniors; hip, eye-catching portals for teens; and thoughtful accommodations for people with special needs. Additionally, she chooses materials that reflect the terrain of the local landscape.

Technology also plays an important role in library design. “[I have to consider what] downloading books and movies will do to the space,” she says. “Does it become bigger to accommodate the technology or smaller because we need less storage space?” Arndt says that technology has



### By the Book

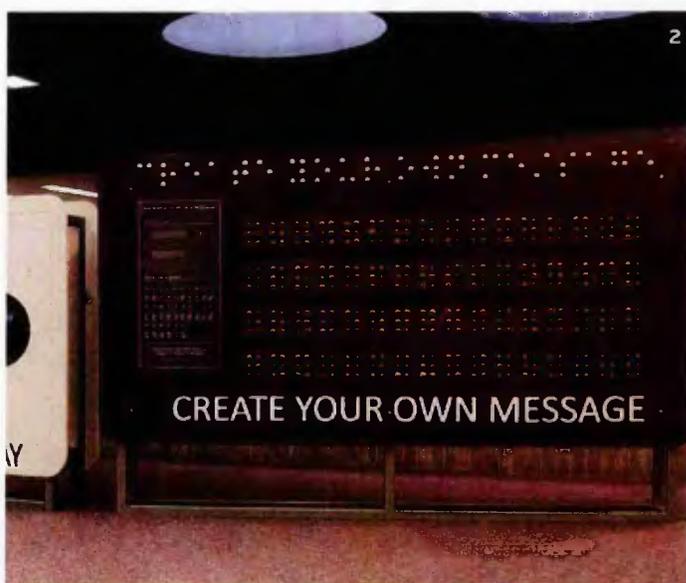
Arndt specializes in designing and building community libraries.

**Because local libraries are cultural centers, Arndt says they can serve as mini-museums—displaying historical artifacts, photographs, and other exhibit-worthy collections.**

**1**  
**Raise the Roof**  
 At the John and Judy Gay Library in McKinney, TX, stone columns and a high wood ceiling bring the outside in.



**2**  
**In Touch**  
 At the State of Georgia's Library for the Visually Impaired, a Braille message board aids communication.



**3**  
**Kid Zone**  
 At the Tucker-Reid H. Cofer Branch Library in Tucker, GA, thematic teen and children's areas get kids excited to visit the library.



become the focal point in each phase of library design. "It has risen to the top of the list for 'critical success factors' in every library endeavor undertaken," she adds.

Because local libraries serve as cultural centers, Arndt also believes that each of her projects should preserve the history of the surrounding community. "The Internet covers the world's macro history, but it's the library's role to represent the five square miles around it and what's important to that community," she says. To capture the community's specific interests, Arndt says libraries can serve as mini-museums—displaying historical artifacts, photographs, and other exhibit-worthy collections.

Before opening 720 Design, Arndt served as director of library architecture for Leo A Daly architects, where project-management training taught her the nuts-and-bolts business aspect of architecture. The experience provided her with the foundation she needed to build her own business. A search for more flexibility in her schedule to raise her two children also inspired Arndt to launch her own company.

"Now that I own my own firm, I work a lot more, but I have some flexibility in my time," she says. "I also have the freedom to work on library projects of all types and sizes, especially the smaller libraries that needed expertise to expand." Quite often, Arndt explains, larger firms are unable to tackle smaller projects. "I feel that is a resource I can provide over large firms," she says. ①

Photos: Leo A Daly (top), T.Y. Lin International and Creative Arts Unlimited (middle), Leo A Daly and Creative Arts Unlimited (bottom).