

# Northampton Library celebrates 25th anniversary

Community resource grew from converted Nike missile site at Richboro

By DIANA R. BOWEN

In 1970 two new buildings opened that would affect the lives of area families... the Class of 1970 was the first class to graduate from the new Council Rock High School on Swamp Road and a new library opened to the public in Richboro. It was the Free Library of Northampton Township.

This fall the library will celebrate its 25th Anniversary with three events -- a Library Fair September 30, An Evening of the Arts October 21 and a Comedy Murder Mystery Dinner November 11.

On October 3, 1970 the library officially opened for business, in a converted cinder block Army barracks, on the former Nike missile site on Newtown-Richboro Road (Route 332).

The library began with an idea in the minds of the members of the Northampton Township Woman's Club in 1966. Spearheading a committee to investigate the possibility of establishing a library in the township were Mrs. Daniel Bello, (now Dorothy Straussfogel) president of the club, who appointed Mary Jane Callahan as chair.

"During our surveys and research we were told, 'never put a library in Richboro,'" said Mrs. Callahan. "But we went ahead. Our club members found people to tell us how to do it and we did it. It has been one of the most satisfying things in my life to see what it is today."

Things looked dark in 1967 when advisors told the women that the prediction for growth in Richboro was nil while Wrightstown was expected to be a large growth area. At this point they had contacted the Northampton supervisors regarding a library with favorable reactions.

The original Library Advisory Committee in



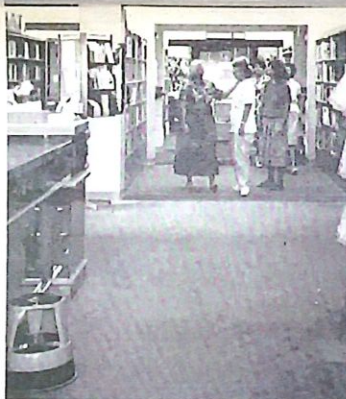
Staff members gathered in front of the present library on Upper Holland Road, Richboro. The library shares the facility with Northampton Cultural Center. Shown are, from left, front row, Beverly Kaelin of Newtown, Holly Ambrose of Perkasi, Ginny Volkman of Newtown, Director; back row, Mildred Stopyra of Holland, secretary; Marguerite Bradley of Holland, and volunteer Marie O'Brien of Southampton. (Photo by Diana Bowen)

1967 consisted of Perry Coale, Mrs. Robert Bretherick, Mrs. Callahan, Mrs. John Cannan, E. Dillwyn Darlington, Mrs. Elsa L. Jones, Michael McKenna, Mrs. Walter Peoples, Jr., David T. Shearer, John C. Van Dreumel. Appointed in 1968 were Robert Crompton and Christine Schott. Supervisor Robert E. Day was the liaison.

Coale, Jones, McKenna, Shearer, Van Dreumel, Crompton and Schott were appointed to the first Board of Library Directors in 1969.

The Advisory Committee decided to table the library in September, 1967 and notified the supervisors. However, the supervisors had already filed an application for the Nike base land using the library as the main reason. The Nike base was acquired in March 1968.

A year later Township supervisors passed an ordinance establishing the Free Library of Northampton Township on February 27, 1969. Volunteers, led by the



This is the center aisle of the library with the reception desk on the left showing a stool for small children to reach the counter. (Photo by Diana Bowen)

Lions Club, Southampton Jaycees and the Woman's Club, spent thousands of hours transforming the old barracks into a library.

In the spring of 1970 an open house was held with the official opening on October 3.

The library became one of the fastest growing libraries in Bucks County. In 1985 the library moved from its cramped quarters to its present location on Upper Holland Road, sharing the building with the Cultural Center housing the Senior Center and Township Archives.

"I never realized it would get as big as it did," said Mrs. Straussfogel.

Along with about 30 regular volunteers, the staff includes Barbara Lewis, Children's Librarian and Assistant Director; Heather Pine, Chief Circulation Clerk; Holly Ambrose, Elaine Barkan, Marguerite Bradley, Jennifer Emig, Teresa Heebner, Beverly Kaelin, Margaret Karaffa, Lynn Salapka, Amelia Lawton was the first full time librarian aided by the following volunteers: Mrs. Charles W. Burk, Mrs. Joseph Cairo, Mrs. Richard M. Fischer, Mrs. Robert B. Homonay, Mrs. George C. Jones, Mrs. Charles J. Justice, Mrs. Robert F. Kalmbach, Mrs. Joseph F. Larkin, Mrs. Martin J. Larkin, Mrs.

Charles T. Luff, Mrs. Wilbur Nelson, Mrs. Robert L. Randall, and Mrs. Kenneth W. Zeuner.

Mildred Stopyra has served the library as its secretary since 1976 beginning on a part time basis. She noted there have been 972 volunteers. Mildred began as a volunteer in 1972.

"I was a 'jack-of-all-trades' working 15 hours a week. I have a lot of memories...when the heat didn't work and we wore coats, when birds got into the building and we would chase them out with a broom...we had a family of Kestrels once.

"When we expanded at the Nike base and the walls were knocked down with dust and dirt everywhere, we stayed open. In those days we knew everybody," said Stopyra. I love it here and wouldn't want to work anywhere else. This is my second home."

With the new building came a new librarian, Director Virginia Volkman. She and her husband, Nick, a veterinarian, live in Newtown Township with their two children, Brett and Sarah.

"Library usage jumped 30 percent when the new building was opened in 1985. Figures show 101,057 books taken out in 1984, 113,132 in 1985 and 147,739 in 1986 for the first three years in this building. And we didn't have book tapes or videos then," Volkman said.

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A handmade sign leads the way into the first library opened in 1970 in the former Nike army barracks building on Newtown-Richboro Road, Richboro.



The old library building now houses the Northampton Township Recreation Center offering a variety of programs and courses for children and adults. (Photo by Diana Bowen)