

ILL

MIRAMAR

# Library seen as first chapter

BY ROBERT SAMUELS  
rsamuels@miamiherald.com

The mural in the lobby of Miramar's new Library and Education Center takes on a metaphoric significance. It shows books, littered along the city's landscape, being used as a bridge to the cosmos.

As the city held a grand opening Thursday for the \$16 million facility, commissioners used the occasion to highlight the suburb's desire to create a walkable core with a bustling feel — somewhere for entertainment, dining and now learning.

The library is key to this future, officials said, the literary piece of a vision for a more cosmopolitan Miramar.

"I'm so excited, I'm almost speechless," Mayor Lori Moseley said. "For nine years, we've been working to make Miramar the best city it can be in terms of offering services, and now we have this."

The first floor of the building holds a 31,000-square-foot Broward County library, the city's only such facility. It currently has 60,000 books and 79 public computers. On the

second floor, Broward College is offering classes teaching students how to be air traffic controllers, among other courses. Nova Southeastern University occupies the third floor, offering graduate-level classes in business and education.

The new facility is the first major project completed in the Town Center development since 2004, when a new City Hall was built at the complex, located at Red and Hiatus roads.

The center's crown jewel — an 800-seat Cultural Arts Center — should open in December. A gym and a restaurant are also in the works, as are more than 500 condominiums and townhomes.

Plans for the townhomes have been delayed as the two major developers adjust to a housing slump and a sagging economy. Oddly enough, the conditions might work to the favor of the new education center.

As unemployment continues to rise, some try to go back to school.

Some 600 students have enrolled in the Broward Col-

lege program, so far. J. David Armstrong, president of Broward College, said the rapid enrollment in Miramar is "the biggest success we've ever had."

Also, there has been a surge in the number of books borrowed countywide, according to Library Director Bob Cannon.

The total number of materials taken from the library is up 14 percent — which Cannon said is directly attributed to the pinch on the pocket-book.

Cannon was one of about 200 people who gathered to celebrate at Thursday's grand opening, where visitors toured the new facilities as a harpist strummed *The Rainbow Connection*, the song popularized by Kermit the Frog.

But resident Julien Vizcaino, 24, just wanted to check out a six-inch stack of graphic novels and video games from the library.

"I really think this is great because it's convenient," Vizcaino said. "I can walk here and it's a lot closer than the library in Pines."



PHOTOS BY CANDACE WEST/MIAMI HERALD STAFF

**BORROWING BOOKS:** Elizabeth Prior, above center, checks out books at Miramar's new Library and Education Center with the help of library employee Margie Jean Leger. Below, David Nash of Sunrise enjoys reading new books at the library.



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