

A Tale of Two Libraries:

Combining The Mariners' Museum Library and Christopher Newport University's Tribble Library

by Mary Sellen and Jennifer Anielski

One of the finest and most important collections of maritime artifacts and resources is located in Newport News, Virginia. The Mariners' Museum, founded by Archer M. and Anna Hyatt Huntington in 1930, not only contains maritime artifacts, it also houses a research library for scholars pursuing all aspects of maritime topics, from historical to pleasure craft research and everything in between. It is one of the largest maritime research libraries in the world. Across the street from the museum is the up-and-coming Christopher Newport University (CNU), an undergraduate institution that is in the process of rebuilding every one of the original structures created in the 1960s—including the library. In 2007, as the new library was nearing completion, the presidents of both institutions met to discuss the future of the nearly completed library.

Timothy J. Sullivan, then-president of The Mariners' Museum, watched the new Tribble Library go up. The museum at this time was struggling with the issue of what to do about the aging structure that housed its library, and Sullivan conceived the idea of moving the collection into the new CNU library building. As past-president of the College of William and

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Paul and Rosemary Tribble Library

Mary, Sullivan knew and had worked with CNU President Paul Tribble. Following many discussions with all stakeholders, they decided that the new CNU library would house The Mariners' collection.

In the original plans for the CNU library, Information Technology (IT) services and ten years' growth for both collection and study spaces were designed into the new building. Eliminating IT and putting the circulating book collection into compact storage freed up the 2,300 square feet needed by the museum's collection and

staff. The museum's collection also went into compact shelving, providing space for significant growth for both collections.

Because The Mariners' Museum Library is the depository for the USS *Monitor* Collection Associated Records, specific standards determined by the National Archives and Records Administration for storing these materials were incorporated in the architectural plans for the entire collection. Strict temperature and humidity levels; walls that are a minimum two-hour burn-through; and the use of specific materials, such as paint, that do not give off gasses that could influence air quality, among many other specifications, were included in the plans. Significant security issues were also a major consideration. Surveillance cameras and electronic access to the stacks and processing areas were issues that made the renovation of the CNU space for The Mariners' more complicated than a normal library renovation project.

The Mariners' Museum Library

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TOM MOORE



Above, the grand opening of The Mariners' Museum Library at Christopher Newport University

Left, The Mariners' Museum Library's newly installed compact shelving

Below, The Mariners' Museum Library's Reading Room

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staff began preparing six months prior to the actual move, including hiring professional book movers and preparing everything to be moved eight-tenths of a mile. Before the move, the staff shelf-read all 86,000 books and inventoried the archival collections, including the hundreds of thousands of maps, plans, charts, and ephemera. When it came time to move, everyone was ready. The museum staff and National Library Relocations, the contracted professional library movers, worked out a schedule to take into account weather delays, vehicular issues, and, most important, to ensure that a library staff person was with the materials at all times, including when the materials were en route to the new location. Careful planning resulted in a safe and incident-free move.

It has been a year and a half since The Mariners' Museum Library

opened its doors on the campus of Christopher Newport University. The public-private partnership thus created has benefited both institutions and their patrons. While the Tribble Library collection is a good undergraduate collection that supports the liberal arts curriculum of the university, the addition of The Mariners' Museum Library adds another dimension to library experience for students and faculty. Not only is the rich content of the collection a significant enhancement, the collection provides opportunities for internship work in archival and rare books. It also provides opportunities for students to fulfill their community service requirements. The move provided The Mariners'

Museum Library with more space, a better facility for housing and storing the materials, and greater exposure. The museum's patrons have the added benefit of using the public services of the Tribble Library, including additional reference resources and the coffee shop.

The Tribble Library is now not only a landmark on the campus and in Newport News, but also a content-rich collection that serves CNU and local and world scholars. The higher visibility of The Mariners' collection has both enhanced the CNU community and brought more attention to the museum and its world-renowned research collection. **VI**