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The New McAllen Public Library: Brilliant!

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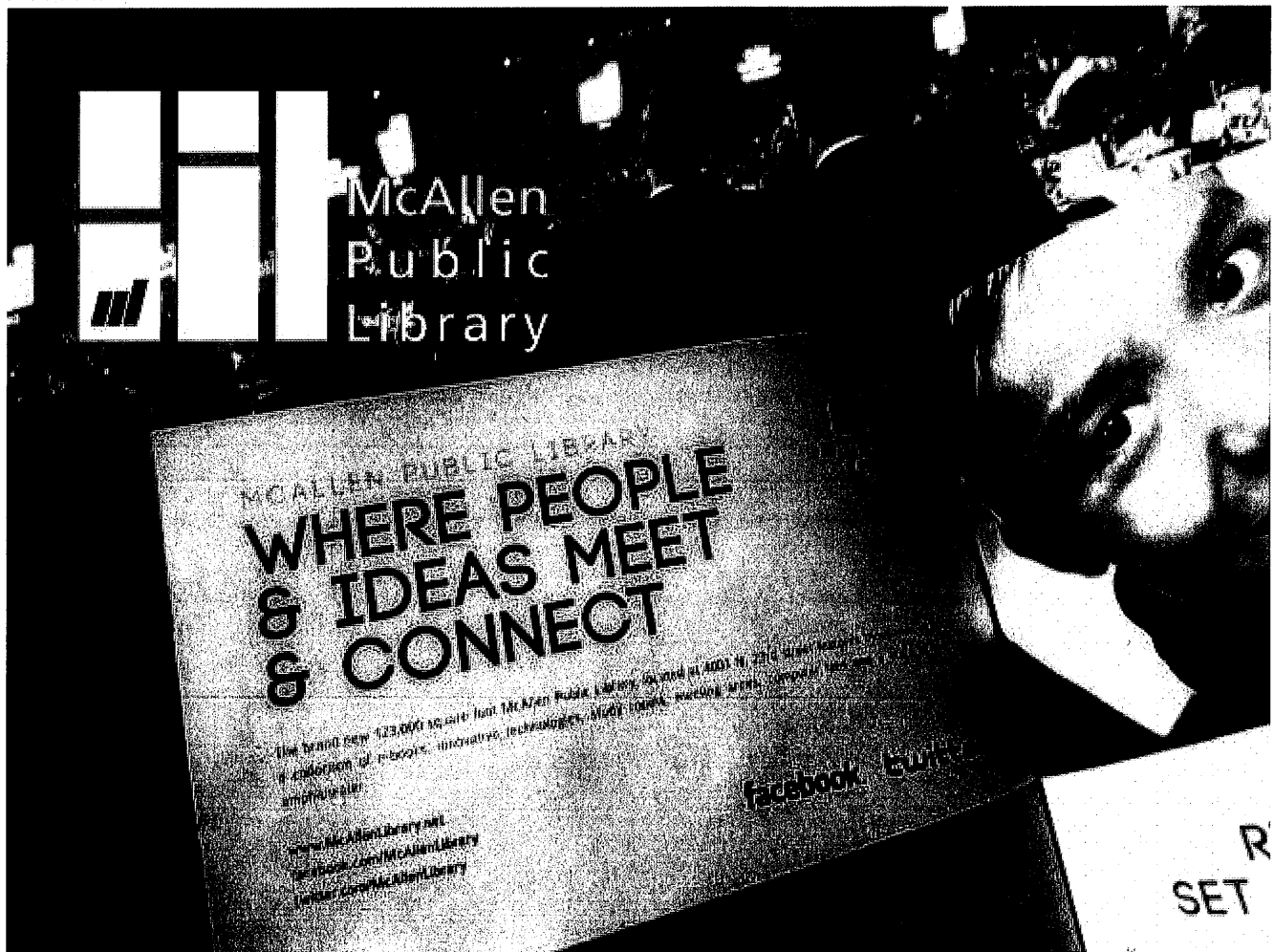


Image from the McAllen Public Library Facebook page. A friend had shared a story on Facebook about the McAllen, Texas main public library moving from a smaller downtown location to a renovated 124,000 square foot former

Walmart building last December. This was touching to me on many levels, so it's worth sharing with other readers if you hadn't heard about it.

The story was making the rounds on the Internet because the architecture firm that designed the new location, Meyer, Scherer and Rockcastle, Ltd., had just won an International Interior Design Association Library Interior Design award.

Learning more about this story was so fun for me. The town of McAllen had a 5 1/2 year journey from choosing the site to financing the work to cutting the ribbon this past December.

Enjoy some of the links I came across:

- The architecture firm MS&R's slideshow of the layout plans and before/after photos
- Articles from *The Monitor* about the long and winding road from the library idea to reality
- Awesome before- and after-statistics from the McAllen Public Library's website

Several of us at GeekMom discussed what a wonderful success story this library is...for numerous reasons.

First of all, we were happy that McAllen chose to invest in their library system. Such good news amidst other communities around the country that are filing for bankruptcy or otherwise can't afford to even buy new books for their library systems. While I couldn't find the breakdown of how much tax money, donations, and loans contributed to the total \$26 million cost, this article gives a glimpse into the city's good fortunes, as interest rates dipped to record low levels just when the city needed it, shaving nearly \$6 million from the new library's price tag!

Secondly, we applauded McAllen's decision to repurpose a vacated Walmart. As this article in *The Monitor* mentions, the project nearly took a sharp left turn as repurposing costs began to soar, nearing the price of demolishing the older building and constructing a four-story building from scratch. As Walmart stores started breaking the mold of the "basic" version and started requiring more acreage for Super Centers, the south became dotted with these empty buildings. Some have been repurposed, such as the Dulles Expo Center in Chantilly, Virginia. This NPR *All Things Considered* story from 2008 discusses the dilemma of how big box store buildings can impact small town economies, but sometimes towns can recover.

Finally, McAllen took advantage of the increased space and funding to be forward-thinking with their plans for technology. One look at the old vs. new library statistics will make it clear: It jumped from 29 to 84 computers on site when they opened the new facility in December 2011. The library administrators worked with several other new libraries around the country to assess how to keep the new, much larger facility efficient for information-gathering. State of the art cataloging systems are also in place that can accommodate the increase in electronic media available for check-out, and online opportunities to conduct searches and renewals.

What else is in the new library? Part of the facility is dedicated to an auditorium, a coffee shop, and a copy center — amenities often found at larger university libraries.

Congratulations to the citizens of the City of McAllen, Texas Main Library for their wise investment!