

## Literacy, History, Community

Since 1893, the Noyes Library in Kensington, MD has enriched lives through books and the community through its presence. Founded by Crosby Noyes, editor-in-chief of the *Washington Star*, and Brainerd Warner, the town founder, Noyes sits on a small triangle of land in the heart of Old Town, Kensington. The land and library were deeded to the Montgomery County library system (MCPL) in 1951, and in 1972 Noyes was designated as a Children's Library and resource center for Children's Librarians.

## The Need for Accessibility

Noyes has never been accessible to those with physical disabilities. Montgomery County's Project Civic Access Settlement Agreement with the U.S. Department of Justice now requires that this building comply with the ADA Standards for Accessible Design. The County, with its budget limitations, originally proposed the minimum ADA "fix" for the 1200 square-foot historic building: a lengthy outdoor ramp; a larger vestibule and entry door; an accessible bathroom; and the elimination of staff workspace and storage in the non-accessible upper story. On the outside, these changes would affect the historic integrity of the building. On the inside, the space required would basically render Noyes unable to fulfill its mission as a library.

## The Foundation's "Universal Design" Plan

The Noyes Children's Library Foundation (NCLF) - a non-profit created in 1991 to support the operating budget of Noyes as needed - felt that the ADA requirements created an opportunity to expand both Noyes' usable space and its mission to promote early literacy. The Foundation commissioned a design utilizing a storybook tower to house a three-story elevator, joined to the Library with a glass-walled passageway so the historic building maintains its original shape and size. A lower level, enlarged from the existing crawl space, and the existing lofted upper level are accessible through the elevator and stairs. All elements of the proposal are based on principles of "Universal Design," going far beyond the letter of the ADA standards to the true spirit of inclusion and accessibility.

## MORE Noyes for All

The new space and accessibility will enable Noyes • to take a leadership role in regional and national efforts to promote early literacy, parent literacy, and a love of books and reading among children and families • to provide inclusive programming, meeting space and other benefits to groups supporting individuals with physical, intellectual and emotional challenges and those for whom English is a second language • and to establish partnerships with library science programs, library departments, early childhood educators, and children's authors and illustrators to help advance children's literature and library services.

## Partnering to Lead the Project Forward

The Foundation's Renovation Proposal has been endorsed by the County Executive, MCPL and the Town of Kensington. NCLF has committed to raise the majority of funds necessary for design and construction, and has sought and received approval of the design concept by the County Historic Preservation Commission. The Foundation and County are currently working to refine their partnership agreement and project budget, while creating a plan for public input, final design approval, and the construction process.

**The unique nature of this design; the age and small size of the building; and the financial and administrative constraints of both members of the public-private partnership all call for creative thinking and strong leadership to move this important project forward. The Foundation is seeking stakeholder support in the form of funding, proposals to reduce design and construction costs, and post-project program development.**