HE TOLD THE STORY of a patron named Michael who was hired at the new Amazon facility in Baltimore with help from the branch’s Career Center. He said, “If it wasn’t for your help I never would have gotten this job.” Michael is just one of countless success stories. There’s Luetic, who was hired by the U.S. Postal Service; Ka, who credits the Business, Science and Technology Department for helping her small business; and seven-year-old Nicholas, who says the library’s Summer Reading Program increased his reading efficiency.

Stories like these showcase the power and impact the Enoch Pratt Free Library has on the community. When I am asked, “What will happen to libraries in the digital age?” I tell stories like those of Michael and Nicholas.

Libraries are more than repositories of books and resources; they are community centers. Stories from patrons fuel our passion for this city, and we show our love by opening the doors every day, providing free services and programs and helping Baltimore families.

This was evident when all Pratt Library locations remained open after the events that happened a year ago. We serve a resilient community and together we are bouncing back with strength.

In the past year alone, the Pratt Library has launched several new initiatives and partnerships to meet the needs of our patrons. Programs like the Read to Reef Book Club that provides city children an opportunity to visit the National Aquarium for free services and programs and helping Baltimore families.

The Habitat Garden grew from the Pratt Library’s partnership with the Southeast Community Development Corporation (SEDCDC). “The Pratt Library has been keenly aware of the Southeast Community Development Corporation’s work in Patterson Park and has been very supportive of phase one of the Library Square revitalization project,” says Pratt CEO Carla Hayden.

“As the square began to bloom, it became clear that improving the library’s exterior was vital to the success of revitalization in the area.” Libray Square serves as an anchor for the community and connects William Paca Elementary with the Patterson Park Branch of the library. Phase one of neighborhood revitalization included new ornamental fencing along the perimeter of the park and engineering plans to address the storm water management and mitigation issues around the park.

The Baltimore Office of Promotion and the Arts funded the installation of a mural on a building that faces the park, and the Parks and People Foundation, along with Pratt Contemporaries volunteers, planted 55 trees around the library on October 24.

For phase two, SEDCDC contacted Patterson Park Branch Manager Rebecca Box about the idea of external improvements. Pratt Neighborhood Library Services Chief Eunice Anderson, Operations and Facilities Management Chief John Richardson, and Art Director Jack Young were soon part of the conversation. Young worked closely with SEDCDC to develop a project that is focused on exterior enhancement, particularly improving the building’s east facade.

His design provides outdoor meeting and program space, Wi-Fi access, a certified wildlife habitat for endangered species like the Monarch butterfly, and a community garden, it is also environmentally friendly and ADA accessible.

The Habitat Garden will be an outdoor extension of the library, complete with eight benches and two café tables to provide seating for up to 40 adults. A large fountain will provide additional seating, tranquil sounds and a water source for wildlife. Wi-Fi access and specialty lighting will add to the garden’s use as a space for horticulture and conservation programs, outdoor activities, meetings, and individual reading.

Funding for the Habitat Garden comes through the SEDCDC from The Baltimore Regional Neighborhoods Initiative (BRNI), a state-funded project aimed at bringing back the vitality and increasing the ability of older neighborhoods to attract new homeowners and businesses. BRNI awards advance the comprehensive revitalization plans and strategic partnerships put in place by local neighborhood leaders and stakeholders.

As the exterior spaces at Patterson Park improve, so will the roof. The Joseph and Harvey Meyerhoff Foundation funded the Patterson Park Branch’s Career Center. He said, “If it wasn’t for your help I never would have gotten this job.”

CARLA’S COLUMN
This Is Our Moment

I received a wonderful email from a librarian at the Pennsylvania Avenue branch recently.

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Spring is in the Air at Patterson Park Branch

There is a new energy in the air at the Pratt Library’s Patterson Park branch thanks to two new grant-funded projects set to begin this spring. A beautiful Habitat Garden will grace the east side of the building facing Linwood Avenue, and the library’s roof will be replaced.
Twenty years is a long time to wait — but through fits, starts, frustrations and new beginnings, Pratt Library leaders persevered to make this transformational project a reality.

HEN DR. CARLA HAYDEN arrived in 1993, it was evident that the building—finished in 1933—was in need of a major update.

Safety, energy efficiency, and functionality had not kept up with late 20th century demand. She almost immediately reached out to Baltimore-based architecture firm Ayers Saint Gross to begin the state funding process to improve the then-60-year-old building. Sandra Parsons Vicchio was chosen to lead the project, beginning a partnership that has lasted for more than 20 years. Vicchio left Ayers Saint Gross in 2012 to start her own firm and still serves as the Library’s Consulting Architect.

For Vicchio, the massive renovation comes down to simple questions. “You think about how you make a culturally significant and important institution like the Pratt work within a city and a state. How do you make it for its citizenry? It won’t be if the systems are outdated and it’s in a constant state of decline,” Vicchio, along with Ayers Saint Gross, Beyer Blinder Belle Architects and Pratt staff, built the case for the renovation of the Central Library with meticulous detail. It would be the first renovation and historic restoration in the building’s lifetime. Jean Campbell, a Senior Project Manager with Beyer Blinder Belle, noted that the project will “maintain the historic functions of the building while incorporating 21st century library services. It will prioritize an ethos of collaboration in the design of both staff and public spaces.”

As with any project of this size, there have been setbacks and false starts, many of which can now be seen as advantages for Pratt customers. Technology advancements mean that the historic floors of Central Hall will not be torn apart for computer hardwiring—as was specified in an early plan—and the evolving role of the library as a community space has taken on increased significance. The renovated building will include dedicated space for community partners, a Job and Career Center, a special Teen Wing, and much more.

“We recognize that this building is good neutral territory for other support agencies to come in and help those in need; we recognize that we should provide more services for young adults and embrace the legacy of teen literacy that began here in the 1930s, and because of the information revolution and the broadening digital divide we know we need to provide state-of-the-art technology and internet access to those who need it most,” Vicchio says. “The Library is no longer simply a place to store books. It’s a place to collect and disseminate information. Fundamentally, that mission hasn’t changed. The delivery methods have simply evolved.”

Through 23 years of effort Vicchio remained optimistic about the project. “I guess I’m stubborn... in a good way.” Pratt CEO Dr. Carla Hayden, the Library’s Board, and staff remained committed to the project. The Pratt responded to overwhelming support from the State and City by committing to raise $10 million in private funds. Having reached the $10 million goal, the Library increased it to $15 million and exceeded that in late 2015. “The outpouring of support from the community has been so heartwarming” says Hayden. “And now the renovation is finally underway!”

Walk through the doors of the Central Library today and you’ll notice relocated shelving and collections as work begins on the upper floors, with more construction scheduled to begin late spring. The complete project should take approximately 36 months, and the library will remain open during the entire process. Hayden could not be more pleased. “Mr. Pratt would be thrilled! Once the project is complete we will have a 21st century Library that allows us to expand our offerings and services, and best of all, is free and open to all!”

We are pleased to report that The Pratt Campaign for Central Library Renovations has been completed as the result of a strong public-private partnership, raising more than $15 million to support the renovations of the Central Library / State Library Resource Center.

We would like to recognize the generosity of the following donors who are making this extraordinary effort possible.
Get a Matching Grant from the Government!

Lots of charitable publications contain short essays extolling the virtues and tax benefits of charitable giving. While that information is certainly helpful, it might be interesting to think about philanthropy in a broader context.

...to think about philanthropy in a broader context. Congress believes that it's a good thing for society if people help each other out in an organized way. To encourage us, the government basically gives taxpayers a matching grant for charitable gifts by allowing us to deduct those gifts on our income tax returns. If you're in a 30% tax bracket and you give $1,000 to the Pratt Library, for example, the actual cost to you of this gift is only $700 because you get $300 back through reduced taxes. In effect, the government matches your $700 with $300 of its own. If your bracket is higher, the government's match is even better.

We can think about this from the opposite direction too. One of the annoying things about tax laws is that we have no direct control over what the government does with our money. People often say, "I wouldn't mind paying taxes if I knew that my money went for education or health care—or, best of all, libraries!" Ironically, the same behaviors in our society.

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Coming to the Pratt*

Apr 9  Mr. Pratt’s Party  the Library’s Annual Gala to support the vital programs and services at the Enoch Pratt Free Library. An evening of fun with delicious food, dancing to the Mood Swings, and a rare look at the Pratt’s special collections. Central Library, 7 PM


Jun 2  Diane Guerrero, star of  Orange is the New Black  discusses her book  In the Country We Love: My Family Divided. Central Library, 7 PM

* See the latest issue of Compass or check out the Pratt’s website for a complete list of upcoming speakers and programs