

Calgary's new Central Library  
**IN THE NEWS**

**New library chance to celebrate**

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There's a first time for everything. As it happens, today is my birthday. Though it's certainly not the first time that has come by, it is the first time my birthday has coincided with this column running in the paper. So it seems appropriate that I might offer some thoughts about celebration -- one of the basic elements of our human experience.

In my own case, I am long past feeling the need to actually celebrate my birthday, but the act of recognition still has meaning. So, it's a matter of degree. Celebration does not always have to mean an over-the-top major event or activity. Sometimes celebration just involves a gesture from another person. The key thing is sharing.

A hole-in-one golf shot, improving on a personal best in any undertaking, scoring a goal -- all can all be expected to generate an immediate rush of adrenalin that pumps a fist into the air, an expression of celebration. But it is so much richer if it is shared with others.

The design of buildings, open spaces and entire cities has the ability to enhance our experience of celebration. In fact, well- designed architectural projects and urban design can be a tangible expression of the celebration of life. That may seem to be a rather grandiose characterization. But think about a space that gathers people together where you just can't help but feel great, where you know that the physical setting matches, supports and is appropriate for celebrating achievement.

One of the most prevalent celebrations that people experience is a wedding. The obvious differences between having it at a church, a sandy beach or a Las Vegas drive-thru chapel illustrates the point. Of course, one's perception of celebration affects whether we think a particular setting works effectively and appropriately. The same consideration applies to pretty much every physical environment, or should.

Another example is an iconic building form: city hall. Ideally, it should be a place that absolutely celebrates democracy, that invites and encourages participation of all citizens. It should provide opportunity for community assembly, where people would just automatically congregate to hear significant good news or celebrate a great victory.

The Olympic Plaza, detached from City Hall across Macleod Trail, tries to fulfill that role. But the fact that spontaneous celebration of victories creates the Red Mile indicates that City Hall and the plaza don't quite achieve that goal. But perhaps there is an upcoming opportunity that can radically change that circumstance.

Beside City Hall is the Central Library, long recognized as being a less-than-perfect edifice for such an important facility. The good news is that city council and the library board have been working for a long time to move forward with a new building.

As a very significant expression of community values and public use, the new library has a tremendous opportunity to be designed to create a physical environment that celebrates learning, exchange of ideas and community gathering. It may require changes to the roadway or even the plaza to really achieve all that is possible in the best way. Celebration is ultimately about reaffirming and enlivening the human spirit -- whether it's about a building or just another birthday.