



Ron Hayden, director of the Huntington Beach Library, was named Librarian of the Year by the California Library Association. Mark Rightmire/The Orange County Register

## SWEET DREAMS REALIZED

By Gwerf Gutierrez  
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### Honored library director awaits end to expansion of Huntington facility

HUNTINGTON BEACH — Among the sea of books and bowed heads buried in reading material, Ron Hayden strides confidently through the Huntington Beach Library, hands in his pockets, surveying his domain.

"I've worked just about every position at this library," said Hayden, the library's director for six years.

His career began here 22 years ago as a page, stocking books on shelves.

And if his longevity hasn't left an impression at the library, his long-awaited project will.

Hayden, 43, was named Librarian of the Year by the California Library Association for his commitment to one of the toughest challenges he has faced as director: a seven-year struggle to accomplish the 43,000-square-foot expansion of the library.

"It's been a sweet nightmare," Hayden said.

The project, expected to be complete in September, includes

an expanded children's wing with a story-time theater, 23 computer stations, audio tapes and compact disc rentals, a gift shop and a saltwater aquarium.

Downstairs will be a 320-seat theater that will be home to the Huntington Beach Playhouse, five meeting rooms and a kitchen — amenities Hayden believes will draw the community to the library.

When completed, it will be the largest library in the state, at 120,000 square feet, and the first to have an automatic book drop system. Residents will be able to drive by and drop the books off at a bin. Through a series of conveyor belts and a scanning system, the books will be checked in and sent to the proper department for re-shelving.

For years, Hayden battled skeptics and opponents who said the expansion was frivolous dur-

ing the recession.

"There were times when I was the only one who believed it could be done," he said.

Hayden emphasized the need for a strong cultural gathering place in the city and the need to capture youngsters' reading interests early.

With community groups such as the Friends of the Huntington Beach Library, Hayden waged a campaign to convince City Council members and the community that his project was worthwhile.

With the expansion's \$8.5 million price tag, Hayden, the library board of directors and the community groups had to come up with creative ways to package the expansion without affecting the city's general fund.

About \$1 million will come from fund-raising efforts. The rest will be financed by loans to be paid off by developer fees from various

projects in the city. Developers are required to pay for city services that will be affected by new housing.

The groundbreaking for the expansion in February was the beginning of Hayden's long-awaited dream. The project has gone beyond Hayden's wildest expectations when he began his career at the library.

When he walked through the doors of the Huntington Beach Main Street library branch at age 21, he intended to be a reference librarian, one of those fact finders who love to search out the answers to obscure questions.

"A kid called me up and asked how much blood was in a mouse," he said. "He needed the information for a science project to see how much alcohol a mouse has to consume before it gets drunk."

Since then, the library has been an exciting place for Hayden — a place he wants other people to share and experience.

"People who think a library is a place where women go around shushing people are way off base," Hayden said.

For Reference

Not to be taken from this room

HUNTINGTON BEACH PUBLIC LIBRARY  
7111 Taibert Avenue  
Huntington Beach, CA 92648