

Burst Pipes Cause PCI Branch Closure in December

By Bonnie Eisenfeld

No one was prepared when, on Saturday, December 20, around 2 p.m., water started pouring down in Philadelphia City Institute, our neighborhood branch of the Free Library of Philadelphia. A unit above the library, in 220 Rittenhouse Square where the branch is housed, suffered a burst pipe, causing severe damage to the library and its contents. The owners of the unit were out of town and unaware of the plumbing emergency, so it took many hours before the water was shut down.

At 10:49 a.m. the next day, branch manager Joe Paradin sent an email message to the Board of Directors. "About half of the entire adult book level was flooded," according to board member Pam Freyd. "Hundreds of books and several computers were destroyed, as well as carpeting, furniture and ceiling tiles." The library was closed to the public

to repair any damage, replace all destroyed materials, and dry and sanitize the carpeting. All programs and outside groups were notified and rescheduled.

Two days later, on December 23, Paradin reported that several crews were working on the task, including maintenance cleaners, flood and mold sanitizers, book-collection care workers from the Central Library, and half of the branch staff. As of that date, assessors determined that about 500 books and DVDs in the adult reading area were destroyed, several computers damaged, rugs soaked, dozens of ceiling tiles collapsed, and dust and debris covered almost all books.

During the cleanup, the drop slot remained open so readers could return books and DVDs. During the closure period fines were waived. The last full day of operation was December

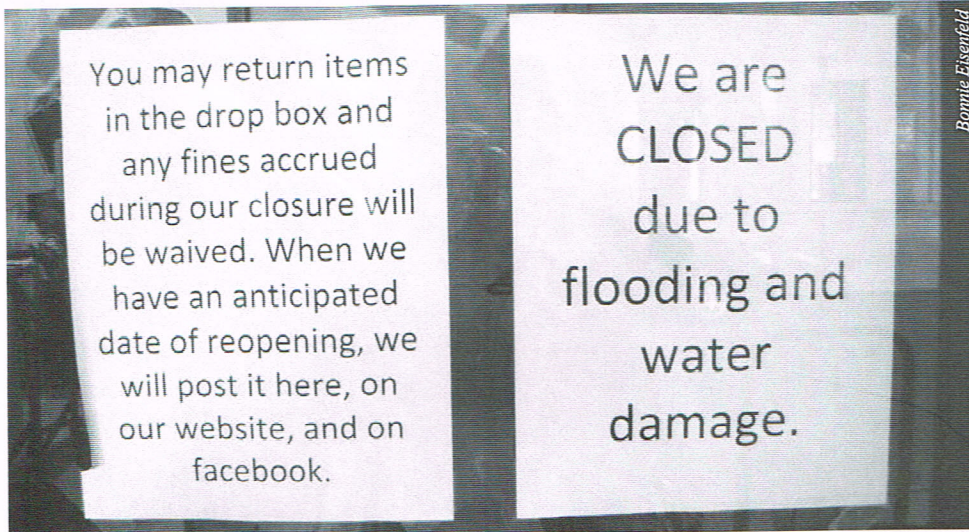
19; little more than two weeks later, at noon on January 5, the library reopened. Patrons were waiting at the door.

PCI, centrally located on Rittenhouse Square, is a busy place. People line up to await its opening every day except Sunday, the one day it is closed. The branch is always filled with patrons reading books, magazines, and newspapers, and using the library computers or their own laptops. The branch also offers a rich array of programs both for adults and for children (on the lower level).

In 2009, the branch closed sporadically because of funding shortages. At that time, there was a chance the entire Free Library system would be shut down. Luckily that didn't happen, and the library system returned to almost normal operations; PCI was open only five days a week. In 2014, hours were extended back to six days a week.

It is some consolation to know that when the physical space, materials, and computers are not accessible, there are digital options available. The Free Library offers electronic books downloadable to your devices. You can connect to PCI's WiFi while sitting in Rittenhouse Square even when the branch is closed, and you can access library databases from your home computer.

In addition to the Central Library on the Parkway, the Free Library system operates 54 neighborhood branches. In 2013, the Free Library reported over 6 million in-person visits and over 7 million online visits.



Burst pipes at PCI: The signs say it all.

CCCulture

Rona Fisher One of Few Local Designers at Craft Fair

Award-winning jewelry designer Rona Fisher (far right, pictured here with Communications Manager Emily Sims) exhibited at the Pennsylvania Guild Fine Craft Fair in Rittenhouse Square, last fall. Specializing in custom work that sometimes incorporates clients' own materials, Fisher works with gold and silver, often mixing metals or combining them with precious or semi-precious gemstones. She is a juried member of the Pennsylvania Guild of Craftsmen and a member of the American Crafts Council. Rona Fisher Jewelry Design is located at 740 Sansom Street, Suite 505. Hours by appointment. www.ronafisher.com

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