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FOX21 NEWS: WE ARE PUEBLO

We Are Pueblo: the coolest Library in Colorado

by Maggy Wolanske

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(PUEBLO, Colo.) — Pueblo Rawlings Public Library brings the community more than just books. Recent building renovations brought new technology, an interactive museum, a coffee shop, and meeting rooms to the library.

"We added additional conference spaces because the library really sees itself as a community hub," said Nick Potter, Director of Community Relations and Development for the Pueblo City-County Library District. "And so being able to have this conference space allows our community to have nonprofit board meetings, homeowner's association meetings, and just different kind of meetings of the mind where they can have a free space to be able to come together and have those conversations."



Interactive museum on the first floor of Pueblo Rawlings Public Library

According to Potter, one of the goals of the renovation was better access to the building.

"So we created a mobility plaza that added better parking, better access to the front door because as a public library, that's a huge thing that we really want to make sure that we're meeting our community's needs," said Potter.

One new technology improvement includes laptop vending machines which you can check out by scanning your library card.

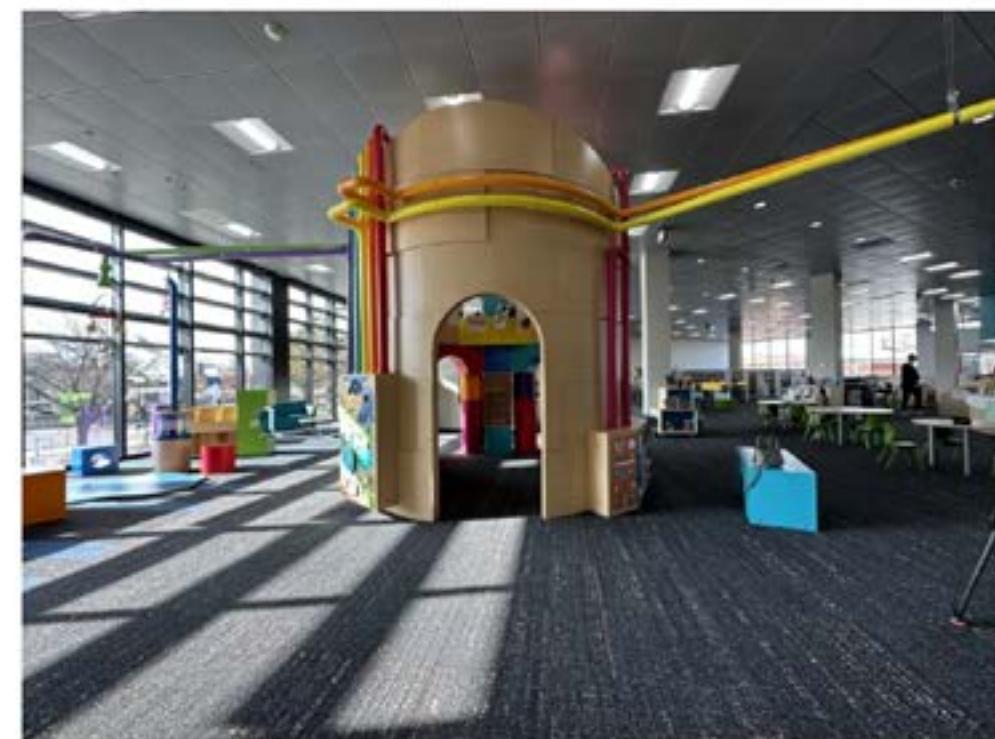
"We have a really cool thing called laptop vending machines," said Potter. "So instead of having to sit at a hard desktop, you can actually go to a machine, scan your card, and then out pops a laptop and then you can take it [mobile] throughout any area in the library to be able to do whatever you need to."

Potter expressed the importance of providing internet access to Pueblo community members.

"So having a public library in this community is hugely important," said Potter. "Pueblo is one of the least connected communities in Colorado. And when I say least connected, I mean by Internet. So we do not compare at all to Denver, to the more affluent northern counties, because we just... there isn't the money down here."

Aside from new technology, the library added interactive equipment in the children's area, which encourages children to build their own plot for a story.

"Really, everything we did with a lot of purpose to make sure that the library, being the place where you access information, is something that we really try to give people tools on having information literacy," said Potter.



The interactive children's zone at Pueblo Rawlings Public Library.

Sarah Fassietto and her family spent time Thursday afternoon in the children's zone.

"It's been a really good place for us to come and let the girls get their energy out and not destroy the house," said Fassietto. "So they get to play with the [stuffed] animals and check out books, and they think it's really fun."

With many new improvements to the library, Potter shared that the library still is a place to come to for checking out books and working.

"It's a place to study and we really have to bridge both of those things," said Potter. "So the library is still a place of books and quiet study and research. However, it's increasingly becoming something more – it's becoming this community hub for people to be able to come together, access information, meet together as a community to create their own dialog."

The Rawlings Library pays homage to the original Pueblo library, which dates back to 1902.

"There's actually the original cornerstone upstairs," said Potter. "And I think that it shows that foundation you know, to make it a pun, but it really shows that foundation of what we are in the community. We're this vital hub for our community, and we serve all walks of life."

When reflecting on the importance of the library, Potter shared that it is a circle of life of children returning back to the library as adults.

"Kids come in here because it does spark their imagination. It does connect them to resources that they may not have at home so they can grow up to be adults that come back to the library and give back to their community," said Potter. "They learn more things. They're a lifelong learner, and they bring more kids back in here to kind of create that community sense, to create that kind of circle of life."

Daytime shelter options sparse for homeless Puebloans during cold snap



Anna Lynn Winfrey The Pueblo Chieftain

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The Pueblo Transit Center, 123 Court Street, will open as an overnight warming shelter beginning Thursday and continuing overnight Friday, Dec. 23, and Saturday, Dec. 24 as dangerously cold conditions persist. Zachary Allen/The Pueblo Chieftain

With the arctic cold front that swept into Pueblo Wednesday night, bringing negative temperatures along with it, people have been advised to stay inside as much as possible and limit exposure to frigid air, as frostbite can develop in 10 minutes.

But not everybody has a warm place to call home: approximately 600-700 people in Pueblo are experiencing homelessness, Alexis Ellis, the executive director of Pueblo Triple Aim, told the Pueblo City Council at a work session in October. And that number doesn't include people who may be couch surfing or on the verge of eviction.

While some warming shelters were open Thursday during daylight hours as temperatures remained in the single digits, access to some public buildings was limited.

All branches of the Pueblo City-County Library District closed on Thursday and will open with a two-hour delay Friday because of the cold.

The library has closed under similar weather conditions in the past, said Nick Potter, the library's director of community relations. He said that other governmental entities have also closed because of the cold. Reference librarians worked with community organizations to create a list of services available to people.

Pueblo County was not offering any warming shelters or immediate services for people experiencing homelessness during the cold snap. County offices were closed Thursday because of the low temperatures and will remain closed until Tuesday next week in observance of Christmas.

The lobby of the Pueblo Transit Center was open for regular business hours during the day and as an option for up to 25-30 people to shelter. The center will also be open Thursday and Friday nights for people seeking warmth. No cots or blankets will be available to people at the shelter, said Haley Sue Robinson, the city's director of public affairs.

City offices remained open Thursday, Robinson said.

The city of Pueblo is sponsoring Crazy Faith Street Ministry to serve as a warming shelter during the coldest nights of the winter. The organization has a capacity of up to 50 people.

Crazy Faith is closed during the day so the people who run the shelter, husband and wife duo Tammy and Lonny Kainz, can get some rest and prepare for the next evening.

Tammy Kainz told the Chieftain they still had enough capacity to house people Wednesday night at their facility on Fourth Street, despite her previous concerns they wouldn't have enough room. She said that the evening went well, except for an incident in which an individual stole the phone of one of their staff members.

Crazy Faith still need donations of food and blankets, as well as volunteer help with dinner and breakfast.

The ministry is slated to remain open nightly through Christmas as long as temperatures remain below 20 degrees, according to an emergency declaration issued by Pueblo Mayor Nick Gradisar earlier this week. The shelter can only be reimbursed if Gradisar issues a cold-weather declaration.

The Chieftain previously reported that the Pueblo Rescue Mission, which operates its shelter throughout the year, is also available for overflow.

Pueblo Rescue Mission was approaching capacity Wednesday. The shelter has 60 beds for men, 35 beds for women and room for 18 people to sleep on the floor. Wednesday night, most of the bunks were full and six people were on the floor, Pueblo Rescue Mission Executive Director Melanie Rapier said in an email.

The shelter has not been approaching its capacity during the day, Rapier said.

"We are serving breakfast and lunch inside and emergency clients are coming in to warm up and eat, but most do not stay all day. We have 51 residents who are mostly staying inside unless they are at work," Rapier said.

She added that the Rescue Mission is doing as much as it can right now to help people experiencing homelessness, even as some staff members are out sick.

"We are seriously committed to improving the quality of life for Pueblo's homeless, especially in weather like we are experiencing now," Rapier said. "Our plan is to drive around in our van this evening looking for people we can encourage to get in the van and come back to the Mission for safe and secure shelter these next 2-3 days."

Other Front Range cities also experiencing negative temperatures have opened public facilities as warming shelters. The city of Denver announced that libraries and recreation centers would be open as daytime warming shelters and set up cots for a 24/7 shelter at the Denver Colosseum.

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COVID-19 testing site at Pueblo Mall closes: Here's why and where to get free tests



Josue Perez The Pueblo Chieftain

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A Pueblo COVID-19 testing site closed Friday after administering thousands of free tests over the past few months.

The testing site, located at the Pueblo Mall, had administered 3,821 tests between Sept. 6 and Nov. 28. A contractor had been running the site, and its lease is set to expire, according to the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment.

The site had also administered COVID-19 vaccinations before it stopped offering them earlier this month, with Pueblo Department of Public Health and Environment citing a return to "normal operations." The amount of people getting their vaccines declined compared with the early part of 2021, and those who are looking to be inoculated are now using their medical providers, the department said.

According to the state health department, community testing sites across the state are using less than 6% of the total number of tests they can administer per week and demand for testing at these sites has dropped significantly over the past several months.

Pueblo news: [What to know about Colorado's plastic bag fee, how it will impact Pueblo shoppers in 2023](#)

"Coloradans have transitioned away from relying on large community testing sites and toward testing at home with widely available at-home rapid tests, health care providers or local retail pharmacies," said Dr. Emily Travanty, laboratory director for CDPHE, in a news release. "CDPHE continues to monitor demand at testing sites across the state as we continue to implement the testing transition plans outlined in the Polis administration's 'roadmap to moving forward' (initiative)."

Puebloans can still access free COVID-19 tests by visiting a pharmacy or distribution center. There are six distribution centers in Pueblo:

- Pueblo Department of Public Health, 101 W. Ninth St.
- Pueblo Community Health Center — East Side clinic, 1301 E. Seventh St., and Colorado clinic, 300 Colorado Ave.
- Pueblo Cooperative Care Center, 326 W. Eighth St.
- Pueblo City-County Library District, 100 E. Abriendo Ave.
- Southern Colorado Harm Reduction, 1249 Routt Ave.

Quest Diagnostics, 600 N. Grand Ave., and Color Health at El Rodeo Meat Market, 1301 Lake Ave., are a few locations that have low or no-cost testing, as do all Pueblo Walgreens locations except the one in Pueblo West.

Puebloans can also order free at-home COVID-19 tests by visiting covid.gov/tests. Each U.S. household is eligible to receive four free tests.

Pueblo County's seven-day positivity rate as of Dec. 26 was 7%, according to electronic laboratory reporting from the state health department. That's below the state's average positivity rate of 9% that was last updated Wednesday.

Pueblo's positivity rate, which offers an understanding of how widespread infection is in an area, has dropped each week since Nov. 18, when the rate peaked at 20% after hovering in the single digits and teens over the few months before that. Transmission level, however, is still considered "high" in Pueblo County, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, which recommends mask use in indoor public areas when a county is in "high" transmission.

Pueblo's seven-day incidence rate as of Dec. 26 was 91 per 100,000, which is on par with the state's rate.

For more information on vaccine availability in Pueblo, visit visitpueblohealth.org/vaccine.

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