A Tale of Two Libraries:
Combining The Mariners’ Museum Library and Christopher Newport University’s Trible Library

by Mary Sellen and Jennifer Anielski

One of the finest and most important collections of maritime artifacts and resources is located in Newport News, Virginia. The Mariners’ Museum, founded by Archer M. and Anna Hyatt Huntington in 1930, not only contains maritime artifacts, it also houses a research library for scholars pursuing all aspects of maritime topics, from historical to pleasure craft research and everything in between. It is one of the largest maritime research libraries in the world.

Across the street from the museum is the up-and-coming Christopher Newport University (CNU), an undergraduate institution that is in the process of rebuilding every one of the original structures created in the 1960s—including the library. In 2007, as the new library was nearing completion, the presidents of both institutions met to discuss the future of the nearly completed library.

Timothy J. Sullivan, then-president of The Mariners’ Museum, watched the new Trible Library go up. The museum at this time was struggling with the issue of what to do about the aging structure that housed its library, and Sullivan conceived the idea of moving the collection into the new CNU library building. As past-president of the College of William and Mary Sellen is university librarian for Christopher Newport University and director of The Mariners’ Museum Library. Jennifer Anielski is technical services librarian for The Mariners’ Museum Library.

staff. The museum’s collection also went into compact shelving, providing space for significant growth for both collections.

Because The Mariners’ Museum Library is the depository for the USS Monitor Collection Associated Records, specific standards determined by the National Archives and Records Administration for storing these materials were incorporated in the architectural plans for the entire collection. Strict temperature and humidity levels; walls that are a minimum two-hour burn-through; and the use of specific materials, such as paint, that do not give off gasses that could influence air quality, among many other specifications, were included in the plans. Significant security issues were also a major consideration. Surveillance cameras and electronic access to the stacks and processing areas were issues that made the renovation of the CNU space for The Mariners’ more complicated than a normal library renovation project.

The Mariners’ Museum Library
opened its doors on the campus of Christopher Newport University. The public-private partnership thus created has benefited both institutions and their patrons. While the Trible Library collection is a good undergraduate collection that supports the liberal arts curriculum of the university, the addition of The Mariners’ Museum Library adds another dimension to library experience for students and faculty. Not only is the rich content of the collection a significant enhancement, the collection provides opportunities for internship work in archival and rare books. It also provides opportunities for students to fulfill their community service requirements. The move provided The Mariners’ Museum Library with more space, a better facility for housing and storing the materials, and greater exposure. The museum’s patrons have the added benefit of using the public services of the Trible Library, including additional reference resources and the coffee shop.

The Trible Library is now not only a landmark on the campus and in Newport News, but also a content-rich collection that serves CNU and local and world scholars. The higher visibility of The Mariners’ collection has both enhanced the CNU community and brought more attention to the museum and its world-renowned research collection.