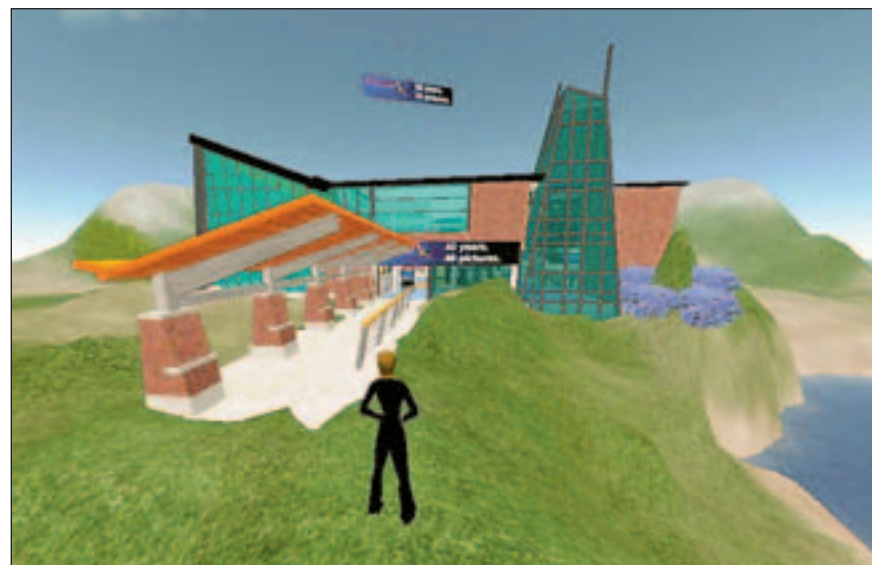


VIRTUAL TRANSFORMATION

Forget the card catalogue. McMaster's new librarian is talking blog, wiki and gaming. He's even giving the university an alternative life on a popular online world.



SECOND LIFE
Second Life's virtual Mohawk College looks like the i-Wing at the Fennell campus.

BY ROB FAULKNER

When McMaster University hailed the hiring of a new chief librarian last year, then-provost Ken Norrie called the arrival of the new man a "coup."

Now, just seven months into the job, Jeffrey Trzeciak is shedding parts of the old regime and changing the basic mission of the library.

Forget resorting to the card catalogue — his "transformation" is all about Second Life, blogs, wikis and the hiring of what's likely the first gaming librarian at a university library.

"We are trying to go where students are," says Trzeciak, a young 40-year-old who plays multiplayer online video game World of Warcraft — a lot. He speaks quickly, like a rapid-fire barrage, even before his large afternoon coffee. "So, we just opened a reference service in Second Life."

In the immensely popular online world, you can go to Mac library's reference desk in Cybary City and ask a question of avatar Danu Dahlstrom (actually, first-life librarian Krista Godfrey).

Like other businesses, libraries are trying to find their way in a fast-changing digital landscape. New users don't see the library as a segregated book warehouse — they want to shape information.

Before last week's Super Conference by the Ontario Libraries Association, OLA president Janet Kaufman noted librarians face a "changing landscape."

"MySpace, Facebook, Blogger, Flickr, YouTube, LibraryThing, Boing-Boing are just a few of the hundreds of social networking sites that are a global phenomenon attracting tens of millions of visitors every month," she wrote.

Paul Takala, manager of electronic services at the Hamilton Public Library, says Trzeciak and Mac deserve credit for adopting a training program to cover the latest digital tools for libraries.

"The social web creates a new dynamic where people are contributing content, socializing and adding value," says Takala.

One example: Mac library's coming search engine won't rely on a librarian's choice of fields, such as title or keyword or genre. Instead, users can search then sort by relevance, the way Google does.

At Mac, you can already see physical signs of change. The McLay Reading Room in Mills Library, transformed into an open-concept learning commons, has computers on nearly every table and a help desk that's all about IT.

Students can find e-books and plug their findings into productivity software, instead of just researching here and doing their work at home.

In 2000, Mac had roughly five current print journals for each electronic one.

By 2005, e-journals had grown 10-fold to 13,912 — outnumbering print



RON ALBERTSON, THE HAMILTON SPECTATOR

Chief librarian Jeffrey Trzeciak is taking the McMaster University's library into the digital age. Below is the virtual McMaster reference library, online at Second Life.

Mohawk College joins Second Life

Mohawk College will open in Second Life next week after buying an island and building a home for prospective students.

The college joins more than 17,000 landowners in Second Life, among them IBM, Nike, a Reuters news bureau and soon, a Swedish embassy.

Mohawk's site resembles the i-Wing at its Fennell campus with interactive photo galleries that profile students and Mohawk's 40th anniversary exhibition.

The college's web design team, which included new-media guru Wayne MacPhail, has created avatars (Second Life characters) to talk with visitors.

Meanwhile, McMaster University's engineering faculty is building a waterfront Café Fireball in Second Life, to launch this month.

Inside, visitors will find an antique espresso maker, Moroccan-inspired seating and open discussion areas. Up a winding staircase will be exhibits of engineering projects.



journals nearly three to one.

On Feb. 12, Mac will launch Learning 2.0 @ Mac, 12 weeks of hands-on staff training. It covers blogs (staff will create their own), RSS, wikis, virtual worlds — in the hope they'll inject these into library work.

Trzeciak shares transformation news on his blog ulatmac.wordpress.com. He's a digital-archive expert from Detroit's Wayne State University, where he digitized and offered free access to 15,000 vintage photos from the Detroit News, for example.

He replaced 34-year veteran Graham Hill as Mac's university librarian.

To shift the library's role, he wants to collaborate with profs, to offer material actual courses need. He wants a "learning library" measured by student success, not the old, traditional metrics like quantity of holdings or budget size.

Trzeciak recently announced Mac library is leaving the cataloguing business; staff had been assembling records on library materials. It raised hackles, he admits, as some staff took

a buyout and others were reassigned. Support for the transformation varies.

"It ranges from absolute refusal to accept that this is a role of the library to wildly enthusiastic support," he says.

He's posted four new jobs, two with "digital" in the title. A third is the Immersive Learning Librarian (a.k.a. "gaming librarian.")

"Normally, librarians are pretty conservative," he says.

But Trzeciak has big plans: digitizing a collection of annotated First World

War trench maps; creating a full Mac campus in Second Life; see a Mac museum exhibit in which art on a screen responds to changes in data, like a window on a living experiment.

And he lights up when he talks about a gaming librarian, specializing in virtual worlds for learning.

They may reconstruct Russian peasant life or the streets of ancient Rome, for an educational trip through time.

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Grade 6 to 9 Teachers: Register your class for this very special Curling Program no later than February 12th!

Every year, the Canadian Men's Curling Championship is the celebrated curling event in the world. This year, in partnership with Newspaper in Education, the 2007 Tim Hortons Brier is sponsoring a program for students in schools within The Hamilton Spectator's distribution area.

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