

A new role with a big goal. This phrase describes the Columbus Library Foundation (CLF) as it heads into a full capital campaign to solicit private donations and grant funds to finance a portion of the construction costs of a new library/cultural arts center to be located in the downtown area.

But let me back up. The CLF is no stranger to fundraising and has supported projects beyond the normal operating budget of the Columbus Public Library for many years. Back in the late sixties the “information age” was demanding greater space for programs and services than the Carnegie Library building could handle. The library needed a foundation that was legally positioned to raise money, so the CLF was created in 1971. The founding members were Leo Dowd, Ron Novicki, Hanson Elliot, William Noll, E.H. Lohr, Norma Schaufelberger, Mrs. H.P. Behlen, Lucy Venable, and Virginia Smith. Winn Jacobsen was the library director and the legal counsel was Bill Grant. Seed money had been given years earlier though a bequest from the Niewohner-Kersenbrock families.

An opportunity to purchase the current library building from the Nebraska Public Power District came along a few years later, but the CLF had to raise money for necessary renovations to convert the office spaces into larger areas for library use. One hundred thousand dollars was raised in just few months, and the required remodeling was completed. The titles of the NPPD building and the former Loup Power District were transferred to the City of Columbus and the current library opened its doors on April 22, 1977.

Under Bob Trautwein’s leadership, the foundation raised over \$550,000, which included a Community Block Grant to convert basement into the current art gallery. An endowment fund was formed when a generous bequest from the Marie Froemel estate was received by the CLF in 1996. Ms. Froemel owned and managed a jewelry store in downtown Columbus for many years. That same fund received another charitable bequest in 2005 from the Louise Saalfeld estate. She and her husband, Elmer “Dutch” Saalfeld, had farmed land near Richland and moved to Columbus in 1972.

Money from the earnings of the Library Foundation Endowment Fund has been used to pay for remodeling of the Children’s Room, hire the Santiago Library Consultants to research and publish a Five-Year Strategic Plan, and to create the Teen Space on second floor. Most recently the foundation partnered with the Friends of the Public Library to create a more comfortable and convenient space for the adult reading area. Improvements included comfortable lounge chairs, side tables with electric outlets for computer devices, new book and print material display stands, and the installation of window shades to block sun glare on the south windows.

Last spring when the prospects of building a new library/cultural arts center were becoming a reality, the CLF restructured itself to become more focused on fundraising. To this end, the foundation revised its by-laws and articles of incorporation, reduced the percentage of board members who represented the

library board, and sought new members whose skills formed a strong fundraising body.

Current CLF trustees are Mimi Ernst, educator; Bill Flint, banker; Abbie Hellbusch, marketing expert; Ramona Kluth, educator; Tom Kreber, accountant; Gail Mead, community leader; Craig Neid, financial analyst; Melodee Pedersen, former librarian; and Jerod Trouba, attorney. Mimi and Melodee represent the Library Board.

The community will be hearing much more from the CLF and from current Library Director Drew Brookhart as plans for the new building progress. Interested in serving on the foundation? Type in www.columbusne.us/library. Click on About Us, then Columbus Library Foundation, then Serving on the Board, and finally click on application.