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Manchester library reaches capital fundraising goal

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MANCHESTER — The Manchester Community Library has completed its capital campaign and raised the \$7.2 million needed to fund its new building, which opened in November of 2014, according to Linda McKeever, chairwoman of the library's board of trustees.

McKeever said there wasn't any single big donation that finished off the campaign, and said she wouldn't be comfortable trying to single out a few donors who had made gifts along the way. Instead, McKeever said she thought of the campaign as a "community event."

"You build a hospital, and it's donors, but this was a community pulling together to make something happen, and people gave what they could. It might have been \$10, or it might have been Jimmy who gave hours and hours of time and said, 'Instead of paying me, I'm donating that time to the library.' I think that's really the story. Yeah, we got there, but we got there in a lot of unconventional ways," she said.

Betsy Bleakie, executive director of the library, said the Sarah K. de Coizart Article TENTH Perpetual Charitable Trust made four gifts to the library over four years, for a total of \$145,000.

Bleakie said those gifts were important because they went to things like sewer, fire protection and paving, which Bleakie called "the nuts and bolts of a building project that often are hard for average donors to get excited about."

McKeever said the library's board members also had some special gratitude for people who stepped in during the earliest stages of the fundraising effort.

"You've got people who came in early with \$2.5 million and \$1.5 million (gifts.) Those people were so significant in making the whole process start (by) coming in early and buying in before there was a building, and before they could see what it was going to be. They were the visionaries," she said.

Bleakie said the board voted to launch a capital campaign in 2011. The campaign "kicked into full gear" in the summer of 2012. The groundbreaking on the new library was in the spring of 2013 and the grand opening was in November of 2014.

The library has seen a lot of use since it opened.

On Tuesday, the parking lot was full, as local business RK Miles hosted a free seminar on Vermont's changing building codes for its customers. Many of the public access computers were in use, and a steady stream of people took an interest in tables full of the latest fiction and nonfiction books, as well as movies that were given a spotlight because they were Academy-Award winners.

While the library has met its capital campaign goal, it still needs money to continue its operations.

This year, the library will be requesting an appropriation from the town of \$198,000, level-funded from the request approved by voters in 2014.

McKeever said that the municipal funds would go toward library operations, while the capital campaign was met through private donations.

Bleakie admitted that things would be "different" this year because the town changed its appropriation approval procedures last year. Instead of being voted from the floor, the request will be part of the Australian ballot on March 3.

"If anything, we're concerned that people might not realize that, so we think it's important to get the word out that this is a different voting model than the way it's always been for the library over the years," she said.

Bleakie said she believes Manchester residents are still supportive of the library, so she's not worried about whether voters will approve the request, if they understand that the time and place to vote is at the polls, and not the floor meeting.

The library has started a public outreach campaign designed to let voters know the appropriation will be voted on March 3. There have also been three public meetings scheduled, from 2 to 3 p.m. Thursday and Feb. 26 as well as from 6 to 7 p.m. Feb. 23, all at the library.

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