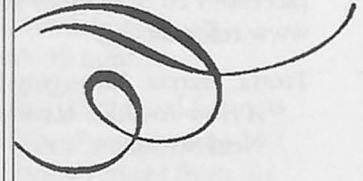# PARTNERSHIPS AND A LIBRARY DISTRICT

by Melody Gault
&
Linda Bruns

On September 14, 2003, the Brookville Library held an Open House and Dedication of its recently remodeled and expanded 1912 Carnegie library building. Approximately 350 community members filled the library for this event, because the community was so involved in the creation and recreation of this facility. This new facility represents a cooperative and determined effort to make the library a center for the community. A number of partnerships helped bring about both a new library for Brookville and a new library district for the region.

THE BROOKVILLE LIBRARY: HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The city of Brookville, like many other cities at the turn of the previous century, found itself with a reading room run by volunteers serving as the community's library. In 1911, John C. Shirk, a well-to-do citizen of Brookville and local business owner, applied for Andrew Carnegie's funds in support of a new public library. When Carnegie offered funding contingent on the donation of a site on which to build, Shirk and others in Brookville quickly raised $110 to acquire the site on which the Brookville Library still stands.

The library dedicated on September 19, 1912 was a fine size for the community then. Mrs. Mae O'Byrne Charni was paid $25 each month to serve as librarian. As time passed and Brookville and the surrounding areas grew, the 2,000-square-foot building needed updating and expansion. The need to accommodate both a collection of paintings by Indiana artists and a set of computers for public use were among the factors that led to planning to bring this early twentieth-century library into the twenty-first century.

PARTNERS IN PLANNING

Through the foresight of a local philanthropist, Receda Schilling, Franklin County was the benefactor of almost $1 million in funding to be used in support of the community. The Receda Schilling Endowment was entrusted to the Brookville Foundation, a private foundation, and the FCN Bank for management. Over the years the monies grew and several organizations benefited from the endowment. Part of this money was set aside for the Brookville Town-Township Library.

REBUILDING AND REFURBISHING

Through many meetings and much debate, it was decided to renovate the original Carnegie Library and build an addition. The library now fills 4600 square feet, approximately twice its previous size. The architectural firm that was chosen has local roots. One of the vice presidents of this firm, Todd Thackery, is a resident of Brookville, and he and his firm did a wonderful job of matching the architectural features of the Carnegie building and the addition. The old and new brick work matches almost perfectly. It's been a long process, but Brookville now has a beautiful and technologically functional library that retains its heritage and has moved into the 21st century.

In addition to the support of a local foundation and the work of local architects, the library was also supported in various ways by members of the community. A group of middle school students along with a few of their teachers came to the library one afternoon to help move boxes of books. Unaware of what they taught, one librarian was making a comment about a wall in the stairwell that she thought needed a mural. A hand-drawn picture of two children lying in the grass reading books had been found when packing the library. All around the children were adventures from books like Moby Dick, dinosaurs, and Little Red Riding Hood to name a few. This drawing was mentioned to the teachers, and Jerry Mainos, the middle school art teacher, happened to be there. He said he wanted to make the mural his donation to the library, and as soon as the wall had been prepped, he started the mural.

The patrons were also wonderful. One day the staff was packing books. A lady walked in and said, "I have two hours, point me in the direction you want me, I will help." While she was a stranger to us at the time, she is now one of our most regular patrons. People in the community were like that. A man who uses the computers every day would get up from the computer to help us move shelving units or whatever we needed,

then go back to his computer work. (Side note: We were only closed to the public for three weeks during all the construction.) The patrons were very sympathetic to all we had to put up with during construction. It seemed like on really bad days, a patron would come in and marvel at how nice things were looking – and that always was a pick-me-up.

EXPANDING FROM A LIBRARY TO A LIBRARY DISTRICT

Also, during this planning stage focused on the original library building in Brookville Township, a group of residents in the Laurel Township put forth a plan to form a partnership with the Brookville Town-Township Library to enlarge the Library District to include the townships of Posey, Metamora, and Laurel. This partnership resulted in the expansion of the Brookville Town-Township Library and a new name, the Whitewater Valley Community Library District and a new library building in Laurel, Indiana, in the northwest corner of the county.

Funds for this project were secured through, the SEIOC and the building was built on the site of the old elementary building in Laurel, which had burned in 1975. This beautiful building is now five years old and is a wonderful addition to the area, all as a result of a partnership within the county of citizens seeing a need and working to find ways to meet those needs.

TECHNOLOGY AND THE LIBRARY

Another partnership that developed because of LSTA funding is the joint effort of the Franklin County Historical Society and the Whitewater Valley Community Library District to digitize local documents and pictures of Franklin County. This partnership was the result, also, of people seeing a need and working to find funds and resources to meet those needs. The Franklin County Historical Society had procured state-of-the-art scanning and digitizing equipment through the Lily GIFT IV program. This equipment is housed in the Genealogy Room at the Brookville Community Library, available for use by community members.

The Board of Trustees of the Whitewater Valley Community Library applied for and received LSTA Grant monies for digitization of local historical documents in the amount of $25,000.00. We developed a web site with the tireless efforts of some dedicated local historians and a few library staff members. The library has many family histories, family indexes, and numerous photos. Staff members and several Historical Society volunteers worked hours to digitize this information so it is accessible online. This can be viewed at http//:www.franklinchs.com/PPP/ and also at the library's site at http://www.wvcl.org/. Additionally, the community site features historic photographs of the region, community links, and local history.

MAKING YOUR LIBRARY A CENTERPIECE FOR THE COMMUNITY

Community partnerships are very important. This was stressed in a three-day class WVCL staff took, "Making Your Library a Centerpiece of the Community," taught by Sara Laughlin. Since taking this class, staff has tried to become involved in as much in the community as possible. We are entering into a Mainstreet Revitalization Project. The library is represented on the committee for this important part of our community. Even though the library has renovated and added on, it is still important to be involved with the rest of the community renovation.

Our partnership with the Judge and the Probation Department has blossomed. As a result, we have around 40 adults attending our GED classes. This is 40 people who might not have entered the library otherwise. The public needs to see that the library today is more than dusty books on shelves. We should be here to meet them where their needs are.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Melody Gault (mgault@wvcl.org) is the director of Whitewater Valley Community Library District.

Linda Bruns (lbruns@cnz.com) is assistant director in Charge of Business Management/Laurel Branch Manager at the Whitewater Valley Community Library District.