

August 23, 2004

## **McMillan Library Remodeling Moves Forward**

At the August meeting of the McMillan Library Board of Trustees, the Board approved operating and endowment fund budget proposals for 2005. These proposals included funding for a variety of important service improvements including the remodeling of a 5,000-square-foot storage area for new public service space, the addition of a third self-check machine to allow users to check out their own books, the 2005 return of Sunday library hours, and a plan to reorganize the library staff to improve efficiency and service quality.

The highlight of the August meeting of the Library Board was a presentation of preliminary remodeling plans by Minneapolis architect Jeffrey Scherer of Meyer, Scherer & Rockcastle, Ltd. The remodeled area, which the Library plans to open early in 2005, will be on the lower floor behind and to the right of the lower level desk. Several walls will be removed to create an entrance to this area from the lower lobby. The 5,000-square-foot area will include the Library's collections of films on dvd and videocassette, recorded music, magazines, newspapers, books for young adults, and possibly new hardback books. In addition to the Library's online catalog, computers will be available for Internet access. The area will be a "hot spot" for wireless access to the Internet for those who bring their own laptops. The area will feature vending machines and an expanded lounge area. It will be possible to allow snacks and beverages throughout the area due to a durable, stain-proof floor covering made of recycled tires. As the area will be designed for casual, quick service rather than for study and extended reading, conversations will be encouraged rather than limited. The interior design will be colorful and contemporary. Final plans for the design of the new area are scheduled for approval by the Board at their September 15<sup>th</sup> meeting.

Also approved by the Board is the relocation of the check out area. Materials will soon be checked out in the lower lobby rather than at the check out desk upstairs. A third self-check machine will make it easy and quick for library users to check out their own books. Those who need help in using these machines will receive assistance from the staff. Although self-check machines are in use at many of the nation's leading libraries, McMillan Library is the first public library in central Wisconsin to make use of this technology. The machines are quickly becoming a favorite service, especially among younger library users.

The return of Sunday hours in 2005 was an important result of a staff reorganization that will promote the efficient use of staff and improve service quality. The number of work hours needed to staff the Library is directly related to the number of service desks that are being staffed. The Library has traditionally staffed four desks—the information desk, the check out desk, the children’s desk, and the lower lobby desk. Consolidating the check out desk and the lower lobby desk will reduce the need for staffing. On the upper level, the children’s desk will be staffed only when library users are present in the department. During low-use hours, the Children’s Department will be monitored by the adult information desk staff. These staffing efficiencies will be augmented by asking library staff at all levels to do more of their “behind the scenes” work at public service desks and by the help of library users who check out their own books. A variety of staff adjustments will be made that will result in a net savings of 100 staff hours per week or 2 and one-half full-time staff positions. These changes will be effective on October 16<sup>th</sup>.

In addition to allowing for more efficiency and improving service quality, the staff reorganization plan will allow the Library to save enough money to balance the Library’s 2005 budget in another very difficult year for government funding. A mere 2% increase in the Library’s appropriation from the City of Wisconsin Rapids is requested in the Library’s budget proposal despite the ambitious goals of a 5,000-square-foot remodeling project and the reintroduction of Sunday hours. The remodeling project alone will cost \$150,000. \$100,000 of this amount is budgeted to come from tax revenue. The rest of the funding for the project will come from the Library’s endowment fund.

Library Director Ron McCabe notes that, “The past several years have been very challenging for the Library. Like most governmental organizations, we have been forced to rethink everything we do to keep our services vital in a time of funding cuts or, at best, meager increases. In addition to the ongoing need to offer our staff competitive salaries, the Library has needed additional public service space to respond to the growth of our collections and to increased public demand for our services. Some of the readjustments we are making are painful. We regret that several staff members will lose their positions at the Library as a result of our staff reorganization. We are proud, however, that the Board of Trustees and staff are finding creative ways to improve service without increasing the tax burden for the citizens of Wisconsin Rapids.”

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