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New arts center downtown

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Hendricks gift will transform former library for college use

As a gift to Beloit College from the late Ken Hendricks and Diane Hendricks, the former Beloit Public Library downtown will be transformed into an educational facility for the arts.

By summer 2010, the 48,000-square-foot facility will house studios, teaching areas and public spaces aimed at expanding Beloit's arts offerings to both Beloit College students and the community.



The old Beloit Public Library building on Pleasant Street was given to Beloit College as a gift from Ken and Diane Hendricks. It will be renovated into an educational arts facility called the Hendricks Center. The new facility should be open by summer 2010.

BDN file photo

The announcement of the new Hendricks Center was made during a news conference at the former library this morning. Plans for the educational facility have been in the works for a couple of years now.

In the original development agreement, the city purchased the former J.C. Penney store at the Eclipse Center from the Hendricks Group and in turn transferred ownership of the library site downtown to Hendricks. Ken and Diane Hendricks then gave it to Beloit College as a gift that includes not only the structure, but renovations as well.

"It was many years ago when Ken and I first met with the library board to discuss expansion and relocation," said Diane Hendricks, chairperson of ABC Supply. "The vision was to relocate the library to the old Beloit Mall and to create a 'community center' which in turn influenced the naming of the mall to the new 'Eclipse Center — where people connect.'

"Ken and I thought the old library with its great architecture could best be used by Beloit College. This would enable the college to become more visible and involved in the community. There have been many challenges in completing these projects but dreams are never met without struggles, and I hope to always be able to continue to add to the sustainability and richness of life of this community."

Once renovated, the Hendricks Center will be home to Beloit College's music and dance programs and other campus educational activities. Community outreach programs and workshops will also be held.

"Located at the heart of Beloit's downtown, it will fulfill the Hendricks family's dream of creating a state-of-the-art education center for the teaching of these important art forms and one that will tie

the college and the community together," said James Sanger, chair of the Beloit College Board of Trustees.

Beloit Public Library Interim Director Elizabeth Cook said everyone at the library is very happy that the old building will be reused for the arts. Although the building was good for a library in the 1960s, it just couldn't keep up with the changing times, Cook said.

"It's a cool building in many ways," she said.

Cook compared the old library to a house that someone lived in for many years.

"It's nice to know someone else will love and take care of it," she said. "We were afraid it would maybe linger. We knew it couldn't sit empty. We couldn't have left if it was going to sit empty."

The Hendricks Center will be an entirely new arts educational facility for the college, said Susan Kasten of the Office of Communications and Marketing. Also downtown is the college's Center of Entrepreneurship in Liberal Education, which houses the Myers Institute for the Art of Business and the Business of Art and Gallery ABBA. Those will stay in the CELEB center.

Since the new facility is in the early phases of design, there's still a lot to be worked out, Kasten said. But she does know there will be rehearsal rooms, a computer lab and smart class rooms equipped with the latest technology. Once the final design is completed, renovations are scheduled to begin this summer.

By next summer, the building should be ready for summer programs with college classes starting in August 2010. Joe Stadelman of Angus-Young Associates is the architect on the project. Corporate Contractors Inc., a Hendricks company, is serving as the general contractor.

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