

Second phase of fundraising for Bentonville library expansion announced

DeSmit named as phase two campaign champion by [Mike Jones](#) | Today at 1:00 a.m.



Christina Clark, children's librarian, leads story-time Tuesday Sept. 12, 2023 at the Bentonville Public Library. Visit nwaonline.com/photo for today's photo gallery. (NWA Democrat-Gazette/J.T. Wampler)

BENTONVILLE -- The Bentonville Library Foundation has kicked off phase two of its capital campaign to expand the public library.

The campaign target of \$16.75 million is nearly fulfilled with \$846,985 left to close the funding gap, according to a news release from the foundation and library Friday.

Bob and Becky Alexander recently pledged a \$300,000 gift to name the children's craft room, bringing the remaining fundraising balance under \$1 million, according to the release.

The first phase reached 95% of its committed funding, according to the release.

The second phase seeks financial support to pay for the library's furniture, fixture and equipment package, the release states.

Plans call for a 22,975-square-foot addition to the library's 38,500 square feet. The library at 405 S. Main St. opened Oct. 30, 2006.

The foundation donated two parcels of land to the city in 2020. The property was valued at about \$500,000. The land is on the north side of the library and was combined with another parcel the city purchased. The additional land provided the maximum footprint for the library's expansion, according to the release.

Flintco, the construction manager, estimates the addition will be complete next summer. Portions of the library will undergo renovation afterward, which will take a few months to finish.

There will be an expansion of the children's department with a new, larger story time space and craft area; a reimagined teen zone with study and collaboration spaces; a makerspace area for all ages; and more meeting and collaboration rooms for the community to use, said Hadi Dudley, library director.

There also will be a book club lounge, expanded veranda and outdoor space, Dudley said.

Dudley said she's grateful for, and proud of, the foundation's efforts to raise money for the expansion.

Nicole Wallace of Rogers said she and her family come to the library every couple of weeks. She has children who are 4 and 6 years old.

"I mostly come for the kids," she said. "I feel like they have a pretty decent kids' area. They have the little small kids' nook and the kids' reading time."

The foundation in May 2021 agreed to raise \$10.5 million for the expansion. Those fundraising efforts have secured more than \$10.78 million, which will join the city's 2021 bond money of \$4.5 million and \$617,000 from the city toward the \$16.75 million project.

Previous campaign announcements from the library foundation include a \$5.5 million grant from the Walton Family Foundation.

"The tremendous success the Bentonville Library Foundation has experienced with our fundraising goal in such a relatively short period of time is a real testament to the power of community, dedication to the library, and the collective effort of individuals, foundations and businesses. Together we are making a positive impact that will affect Bentonville for generations," said Teresa Stafford, foundation executive director.

Shana DeSmit is the phase-two campaign champion. DeSmit serves as vice president, divisional merchandise manager of meat and seafood for Sam's Club, according to the release.

The campaign champion advocates for libraries as valuable in all communities and the Bentonville community as both the city and the library expand to meet the needs for all, according to the library foundation.

The phase-one campaign champion was Anthony Soohoo, who was executive vice president of Walmart's Home Division but is now retired, Dudley said.

DeSmit "has the experience, enthusiasm, and desire to work with the board and community to complete this project that will benefit the growth that our library has seen every year," said Howard Kerr, foundation board president.

DeSmit said when she was growing up, she spent hours at the library, exploring and fueling a passion for reading and learning.

"I continue to believe that reading has the power to change the world, allowing us to learn from our past, explore our present and invent the future," she said.



Cari Maxwell of Centerton, and her son Jack, 1, use the self check-out Tuesday Sept. 12, 2023 at the Bentonville Public Library. Visit nwaonline.com/photo for today's photo gallery. (NWA Democrat-Gazette/J.T. Wampler)



Shana DeSmit