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Foundation Celebrates Fundraising Goal

By Cathy Tyson



Photo courtesy Kathy Merchant

when you grow up."

Foundation Executive Director Kathy Merchant eagerly praises the new President, "Mike is very gracious, a voracious reader, a gifted writer and has great organizational skills - along with a financial background." He and his wife moved to Lafayette in 1990 and always had a passion for a new library. Gilson worked for many years in the corporate world and has been actively involved in quite a number of community projects.

Gilson feels he has a special obligation as President since so many friends and neighbors contributed -over 25% of the households in Lafayette donated to the initial fundraising campaign- that the Foundation needs to manage the Library effectively and spend resources wisely.

Even before the official grand opening in November of 2009, it's been a learn-as-you-go process for Merchant. She stays ridiculously busy managing the day to day operations of the establishment.

"We need the community to understand we need them, can't do it without them," said Merchant. Both Merchant and Gilson credit a number of people with the success of the Library, Librarian Susan Weaver Librarian, Building Manager Brian Long and the Friends of the Library.

As the nature of learning has changed, so has this Library. By moving from a traditional building for quiet reading to a community living room and gathering space, this unique facility embraces the challenge of appealing to disparate groups of users. By offering a layout with a separate Community Hall, homework center, kids area and meeting rooms - everybody's happy and wants to come back for more.

In addition to fundraising, the Foundation manages the first of its kind Glenn Seaborg Consortium - a partnership of a dozen renowned education, science and arts institutions. These partners offer an array of specialty programs designed to appeal to a broad audience - from toddlers to seniors. In February look for events on Building the Hoover Dam, The Obama Effect: Where does the African American Community Stand Now and a special Sweet Thursday event with author Po Bronson. As the Library's popularity has snowballed, even more innovative groups want to hold events at the Library - like the World Affairs Council and the Gold Coast Players. For more information, go to www.LLLCF.org.

Art at the Library

Don't miss the brand new art exhibit in the Community Hall Gallery, "A Compendium of Birds," by Martin Lasack. The beautiful birds will be in residence until mid-March. The Gallery is open on Monday evenings from 6:30 and when there are public events scheduled at the Community Hall. Also look for the portrait of General Lafayette that was a generous gift from Gilbert Sonet and his son Noah - it's just to the right of the Information Desk.

There was champagne to celebrate reaching the \$4 million goal of the Lafayette Library and Learning Center Foundation's ("Foundation") Open Doors, Open Minds campaign. Even in a tough economy, generous donors contributed funds to literally keep the doors open of the one of a kind Lafayette Library and Learning Center. Longer hours, increased programming and the sustainability of the building were made possible by donations from individuals, foundation and corporate grants, room rentals, and special events. With 53% of the facility's total operating costs paid for by the Foundation, monetary support is critical to keep this public treasure open for business.

"Attendance at the library is mushrooming by the day" said Mike Gilson, newly appointed President of the Foundation Trustees. "Over 450,000 patrons have come through the doors in the first year - an extraordinary achievement. Clearly it's had a positive effect on Lafayette."

"We're finding our expectation of participation is always exceeded," said Gilson, who is responsible for a variety of things including strategic planning. One of his tasks was to create his own job description: "help crystallize thinking and define 'what you want to be

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