



# Friends of the Jackson County Main Library

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## PRESS RELEASE

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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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### **Community individuals show support, tell stories about library experiences**

Although the Friends of the Library's fundraising campaign for furnishings for the new library has not yet entered its public phase, some Jackson County residents have already made significant gifts, responding to a number of the project's naming opportunities.

While all the donors share a love of reading, they offer many more reasons for their support of the library project.

June Smith, president of the Friends of the Library, accepted that position because the library is something she believes in. She and her husband, Newt, made a gift to the library for the same reason.

"I was a voracious reader, growing up," Smith said. "I had plenty of friends, but friendship with a book is different."

Smith said that when she was a girl she used to ride the bus—the fare was 10 cents—to the main library in Winston-Salem.

"I would check out seven books, ride the bus back home, read the books and then go back the next week for seven more," she said. "To this day I can call up what the juvenile reading room smelled like."

Another donor, Betsey Hamlet, also remembers how the library of her childhood smelled. She even remembers Miss Rachel, the children's librarian in Westbrook, Maine, where she grew up.

"Literacy is a big thing of mine," she said. "Kids need to learn to read books. And don't think you can substitute a computer screen—you can't take a computer screen to bed with you."

Hamlet and her husband, Ed, chose to make a gift to name the teen area of the new Jackson County Library in honor of their parents.

“Ed’s parents were active Scout leaders, and my parents ran a summer camp for young people,” Hamlet said. “Naming the teen area in honor of them was a no-brainer. It seemed the best way to honor both sets of parents.”

Sue Ellen Bridgers of Sylva, the author of seven books, chose to support the new library because “we need one so desperately.” As a member of the Friends of the Library and a former member of the library board, she remembers many years of discussion about expanding the current library.

Bridgers said the existing library was one of the reasons she and her husband, Ben, moved to Jackson County from Chapel Hill nearly 40 years ago.

“We came here because there was a university, an Episcopal church, a job for Ben, and the new library was like cream on strawberry shortcake,” she said.

Ben Bridgers, a retired lawyer, has some reasons of his own for supporting the new project.

“In addition to the usual library stuff, I’m glad they’re actually going to be able to preserve the old courthouse,” he said. Bridgers expressed a “great deal of affection” for the building itself, since it’s the place where he began his practice of law here and where he worked with many fine people.

“It’s part of the community itself,” Bridgers said. “It’s a visual symbol of who we are.”

Bridgers, who said he was only the seventh lawyer in the county when he moved here, said he hoped his and his wife’s gift would encourage other lawyers to contribute to the project.

Ruth Shuler of Cullowhee said the Jackson County library has always been a big part of her life. She remembers when it was just one room in a building on Main Street.

“I’ve always been very much interested in reading,” she said. “It’s still a big hobby of mine. I just feel it’s important to support the new library in the hope that other children will feel that sense of joy that I felt.”

Shuler said she had recently attended a presentation about the new library at her book club.

“Seeing all the drawings and hearing about the plans, it’s very exciting,” she said. “It will be so good to have a place where the community can come together.”

Vance and Kathy Davidson expanded on that thought, offering yet another reason for supporting the new library—it will be a community resource.

“In addition to my serving on the Fontana Regional Library board, Kathy and I are very avid readers,” Davidson said. “We share a love of reading—you should see the number of books in our house.”

The Davidsons see the new library as a gathering place.

“In addition to checking out books, DVDs, etc, the library will offer exhibits of art and handicrafts and a place for people in the community to come together,” Davidson said. “When Kathy and I discussed making a gift, that kept coming up—the library will be a community resource.”

Kay Byer, poet laureate of North Carolina, thinks of the library as a central place.

“The public library has been important to me and my family from the time we first moved here,” she said, “but especially when our daughter was born. It became the center of our weekly activity. We loved story hour and spending time at the library and getting to know the staff. I consider a library to be the center of a town’s cultural life, and the family’s, too.”

Byer even wrote a poem, “Beginning at the Bottom,” about her first hometown library in southern Georgia. It ends:

To that hive of bookshelves,  
I journey again  
and again, letting go of my one life  
to enter the stories of others.

still hungry for words  
and the way they can bring me back  
home to my senses,  
the way they reach out to the world.

John Bunn, co-chair of the campaign steering committee for the Jackson County Public Library Complex, couldn’t settle for just one reason to support the project. Instead, he named four or five.

“I first became acquainted with the library when I was 12 years old,” Bunn said. “We moved to a new town. It was the end of the school year, and I had no friends and no school. That summer I

became acquainted with books and the library out of loneliness. But the experience created a lifelong love of libraries.”

Bunn said that the world of books creates a better person.

“A library permits a child’s imagination to take hold,” Bunn said. “I have a great-granddaughter who has fallen in love with books. How important it is for young families to see their children blossoming in a world of new possibilities!”

But he didn’t stop naming advantages for just young people. He said older folks will benefit from the new library, too.

“There’s no greater companion for the elderly than a book,” Bunn said.

He said people with a taste for history will find much to interest them in the new facility.

“Combining the library with our historic courthouse connects it to local history,” Bunn said. “It’s not just a library—the preservation of the past is part of the project.”

Bunn said even people looking to save money will find value in the library.

“We know that fewer and fewer people are availing themselves of the daily newspaper, to save money,” he said. “And now the library has the daily newspaper, and people can go there and read it for free.”

For all kinds of people, Bunn said, “The library will become such a welcome part of their lives.”

Additional naming opportunities exist within the library complex. Anyone interested in discussing the opportunity to have a feature of the new library complex named for themselves, in honor of someone or in memory of someone should contact the campaign co-chair, Mary Otto Selzer, at 293-0074

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