

# ADVANCED LEARNING

WICHITA'S 21<sup>ST</sup>  
CENTURY LIBRARY

A \$38 MILLION PUBLIC AND  
PHILANTHROPIC PARTNERSHIP

SWANSON  HOUSE  
SIGNATURE FUNDRAISING SERIES



# ADVANCED LEARNING

## Wichita's Public Library Campaign

### A \$38 Million Public & Philanthropic Partnership

#### The Objective

From the project's inception, the City of Wichita sought a partnership with the Wichita Public Library Foundation (WPLF) to raise funds for a new, advanced learning library. The project would replace a 55-year-old central library. A \$38 million project overall, \$9 million was raised through philanthropy.

Over its first 25 years in existence, the WPLF had built a \$4.2 million endowment and was annually supporting library programs and other needs. A multi-million-dollar capital campaign required new resources and a larger development structure for the organization

"The Foundation Board welcomed the challenge," says Don Barry, WPLF Board Chairman. "It was the first opportunity for the Foundation to engage large and small donors in a signature project in the life of the city. We knew it would require new development resources, and require us to address the concept of 'the public library' in 21st century America."

#### Perception Versus Reality

Are public libraries outdated? The simple answer is 'no'.

But campaign staff and volunteer leaders prepared for the public's perception that libraries are no longer necessary. Campaign messaging, arguments and rationales were developed to motivate and inspire prospective donors.

"Modern libraries are learning centers," says Barry who served as Campaign Chair. "They link knowledge, literacy and education for everyone—regardless of income, education, age or physical ability."

With a "digital platform" built into its infrastructure, an incubation center and collaboration spaces, the 21st century library energizes and empowers individuals, organizations, associations and business. This message was occasionally expressed as "People. Place. Platform."

"At the core of our message was the idea that reading, communicating, learning, playing, meeting and building were at the heart of the new library," says Cynthia Brenner. "It helps people be creators, not just readers. Its physical structure provides a keystone for citizen engagement, economic development and community revitalization. The library strengthens Wichita's identity and sense of community. These were narratives we would expand on."

#### Campaign Director & Fundraising Counsel

With only one employee, and millions of dollars to raise, the WPLF made new investments in its development program.

An experienced major gifts officer, Sharon Miles, was hired to work with volunteer leaders and fundraising counsel to execute the numerous activities required for a successful campaign. Swanson House, Inc., a national fundraising consulting firm with strong ties to Wichita, was retained to

"The new library helps people  
**BE CREATORS,**  
not just readers." — Cynthia Brenner

#### —CAMPAIGN— LEADERSHIP

Mary Lynn Oliver  
*Honorary Campaign Chair*

Don Barry  
*Campaign Chair*

Leah Barnhard  
*Executive Director*

Tom Borrego  
*Campaign Director*

Sharon Miles  
*Campaign Director Emeritus*

Mary Eves

Susan Estes

Rosie Dool

Jane McHugh

Kevin McWhorter



# “Modern libraries are learning centers. They link **KNOWLEDGE, LITERACY AND EDUCATION FOR EVERYONE.**”

– Don Barry, Campaign Chair

provide structure and guidance. The firm’s knowledge, expertise and experience were employed to design, implement and execute the campaign.

“Private-public partnerships have unique dynamics, particularly in the context of philanthropy,” says Robert Swanson, President & CEO, Swanson House. “The WPLF and the Wichita Library System became a powerful team as they worked together to advance the campaign.”

## A Larger Footprint

The new library budget had been developed a decade earlier. Inflation and other cost adjustments required the facility footprint to be reduced and plans modified. Within the reduced space, library leaders feared the building would limit the library’s ability to offer the programs and services which were at the center of the decision to build a new facility. The WPLF agreed to raise an additional \$3 million to ensure the footprint of the facility was not reduced.

“Campaign leadership was terrific,” says Cynthia Brenner, Director of Libraries.

“When we explained the challenges that would result in the smaller building, they said, ‘We’ll raise the money.’”

“One of the hallmarks of this campaign,” says Swanson, “is the bold, fearless approach leadership took to cultivating and soliciting donors. They studied, they planned and then they engaged with donors. This thoughtful approach combined with their ‘do-or-die’ attitude resulted in some remarkable gifts.

To address the 10,000-square-foot-challenge, they secured a \$3 million gift from the Dwane & Velma Wallace Foundation, a highly visible foundation in the area.”

WPLF’s professional approach secured signature leadership gifts from the Wallace Foundation, Cox Communications, James M. Cox Foundation, Naftzger Fund for Fine Arts, Capitol Federal Foundation, and the Sunderland Foundation.

“Wichita is a very philanthropic community,” says Swanson.

“Funders were eager to be a part of this signature project for the local community.”

## Cancer Forces Change in Leadership

\$2.1 million had been raised when cancer sidelined campaign director Miles, who was hired specifically for the campaign. “The Foundation was understaffed. We knew we needed an experienced major gifts officer,” says Barry. “I had worked with Sharon on several different projects. She was donor focused and mission driven.”

“Sharon’s professionalism was exceptional,” says Swanson. “She kept her fight with cancer to herself. Only a few knew of her illness until the day she had to resign. Her final solicitation, partnering with Don and Cyndi, resulted in a \$3 million gift.”

## Hard Target Executive Search

Securing a new campaign director was an urgent priority. “We turned to our consulting firm. Swanson House recommended that we identify known, successful development officers, and ask them if they would interview for the position. They call it ‘the hard-target strategy,’” says Barry, who explains this approach was more proactive. “Instead of advertising and waiting for candidates, we identified individuals we knew were already qualified.”

Members of the Campaign Leadership Committee and Swanson House identified five candidates. All agreed to be interviewed. “Three of us conducted the interviews,” says Swanson. “We made our selection, and Don, authorized by the board, negotiated the contract. Our first-choice candidate said ‘yes’.”

Tom Borrego, a veteran of university and hospital fundraising, started working as campaign director 30 days after his interview. “I was intrigued with the process,” says Borrego. “They were focused. They were decisive, honest and direct in our conversations. As a veteran nonprofit professional, I was impressed.”

## It’s a Process: Identify. Cultivate. Solicit. Repeat.

A campaign leadership committee was recruited. A community stalwart, Mary Lynn Oliver agreed to serve as honorary campaign chair. Working with the campaign director and fundraising counsel, the campaign leadership committee (CLC) quickly began the primary work of the campaign—major gift solicitation.

Donors were identified. Donors were cultivated. Donors were solicited.

This work was never-ending in development, with each step carefully repeated dozens of times. Different strategies were employed in different steps at different times throughout the life of the campaign. For example, tours of the facility were added to the cultivation step when construction allowed.

Swanson House worked with staff and the CLC to develop the tools and resources needed for a successful campaign. Donor proposals were customized, as were cultivation and solicitation strategies. Tracking and management tools recorded progress and guided activity.

## Final Appeal

“With 96 percent of our goal in place, we implemented Swanson’s end-game strategy,” recalls Borrego. “This strategy is about more than money. It serves to ensure that all those with a desire to participate and support a project are given an opportunity, regardless of the size of their gifts.”

Donors were given the opportunity to place a name on the Donor Wall of Honor in the library’s grand gateway. “It is half a century between this and construction of our current library. It will be many more years before the next downtown library. We wanted to make sure this generation had a chance to be involved.” All told, 1,200 library supporters were solicited, and \$265,000 was raised.

## –DONORS– BY GIFT RANGE

GIFTS RANGE	# OF GIFTS
\$1 Million & Above	2
\$500,000 & Above	2
\$250,000 to \$499,999	4
\$100,000 to \$249,999	9
\$50,000 to \$99,999	13
\$25,000 to \$49,999	11
\$10,000 to \$24,999	18
\$1,000 to \$9,999	172

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– Cynthia Brenner



**BOOK BRIGADE** - Thousands gathered on June 16, 2018, spread across .7 miles, passing symbolic items and books from the old Central Library to the new Advanced Learning Center.



**RENDERINGS** - Original plans for the new Advanced Learning Center.

► continued on back

Swanson House, a full-service fundraising consulting company, has partnered with nonprofits across America to build stronger, more dynamic and effective organizations. Those working with Swanson House consultants have raised more than one billion dollars. Thoughtful, creative and bold strategies are delivered by professional counsel dedicated to helping the nonprofit community better serve its clients.



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► *Advanced Learning...continued*

## Public/Private Ventures

Public private partnerships, like the one between the City of Wichita and the Wichita Public Library Foundation, challenged the expectations and needs of both entities.

"Authorizing an obligation bond-funded project through a capital improvement program while a separate party is attempting to raise \$8 million can be hard to balance," says Barry. "Council votes, administration oversight, timelines for contracts and construction, equipment, furnishings and so much more depend on effective communication, timely discussions and—at times—some negotiation."



"Parties have to approach these ventures in good faith," said Swanson. "It takes a bit of courage on everyone's part to believe each party will meet or exceed its commitments. Balancing needs and obligations requires honesty and frank conversations."

## Library Foundation @ 30

"In our early work, Swanson House suggested that the campaign should

serve as a catalyst for building an ever-stronger, more dynamic Library Foundation," recounts Barry. "This strategic idea appealed to us. The Foundation would be 30 years old around the time the campaign was completed."

With the retirement of the Foundation Executive Director Leah Barnhard at the end of the campaign, Borrego was selected as the new WPLF President & CEO. The change in leadership signified a new day—for the library, the foundation and the public, who would benefit from the enhancements made possible through the noteworthy fundraising endeavor.

"Campaigns are about more than buildings, programs and endowment," says Swanson. "Campaigns serve to improve the lives of those served and the communities in which they live. When those investing their charitable dollars in such a project experience the benefit, they are willing to continue investing in the organization."

With the conclusion of the campaign, the WPLF began an overhaul of its operations including development. "Our goal is to build on the success of the campaign and engage even more people in support of the Wichita Public Library," says Borrego. "Our fundraising success, civic pride, this exceptional new library and the power of books and information opens new opportunities for us to engage donors."

