SAN BERNARDINO CITY LIBRARY FOUNDATION

A Brief History

Since the first decade of the 20th Century, the San Bernardino Public Library has been governed by an autonomous Board of Trustees appointed by the City Mayor. However, unlike some other city libraries, it has had no independent taxing authority and has necessarily relied on an allocation by the City Common Council from its general funds for the Library's funding.

In the early 1990's, the needs of municipal services throughout the country were generally increasing more rapidly than were revenues, and the felt priority needs of police and fire departments usually trumped the needs of libraries when it came to allocation of scarce funds. The San Bernardino Public Library, in particular, increasingly found that the revenues allotted to it by the City Council barely covered day-to-day operational needs and left little or no room for the acquisition of new equipment, books, etc., to meet the needs of a rapidly growing population and the new age of technology.

For some time, a few libraries in the country had had foundations, and now more and more municipal libraries were turning to such a concept in order to meet their financial requirements. In the fall of 1995, Robert Ewing then the director of the San Bernardino Public Library, called together a half dozen people who had long established interest in the library and other civic affairs. These were R. Warburton Miller, Dimitri Vasillakos, Bill Lemann, Shelby Obershaw, Rabbi Hillel Cohn, and Ed Keller to discuss the establishment of the San Bernardino City Library Foundation. The first formal meeting of this group as a Board of Directors for the new Foundation was in early December, 1995. Warburton Miller was the first president and continued in that position for several years.

The Foundation was duly incorporated as a non-profit corporation under the laws of California and qualified as a 501 (c)(3) corporation.

It was determined that the Foundation would establish an endowment fund, the principal of which would never be tapped, but the income from which would ultimately be made available for the purpose of satisfying certain needs of projects for which no municipal funds would be available. It was recognized that this would be a fairly long-range project. A $1,000,000.00 minimum endowment fund was initially proposed, but it was decided that a $500,000.00 minimum endowment was a much more realistic goal, and, indeed, the passage of time has borne this out.

The next significant decision was that the permanent recognition of significant contributors would be by the establishment of a Donor Wall which would bear the names of all who contributed more than $1,000.00 each. Under the leadership of Dimitri Vasillakos, this was completed within a year or two after the formation of the Foundation.

It now bears 99 plaques with the names of contributors, 82 of which represent
contribution of $1,000 or more, 9 of which represent contributions of $5,000, 5 of which represent contributions of $25,000, and 3 of which represents contributions totaling $100,000 or more.

At the unveiling of the wall, a primary feature was a short truly inspirational message given by Rabbi Hillel Cohn. On June 26, 2006, a celebration of the final reaching of the initial goal of $500,000.00 endowment will feature Rabbi Cohn again.

The Donor Wall is located in the lobby of the Norman Feldhheim San Bernardino Central Library, named for Rabbi Cohn's immediate predecessor who was not only a long time supporter of the Library, but also a distinguished and well-loved civic leader of San Bernardino for many years.

To date, the most significant gifts have come, not from corporations or multi-millionaires, but from those with a true love for libraries and what they do for a community. Putting the Foundation's endowment over the $500,000.00 mark have been the proceeds of two charitable trusts established by Louis Block in the memory of his sister, Genevieve, and himself.

Following Warburton Miller as president of the Foundation have been Edgar C. Keller, Maureen Godfrey, Charles Herbert, Martha Pinckney, and June McDade. The current president, elected June 1, is Maureen Godfrey.

The by-laws provide that no member of the Board of Directors shall serve more than six consecutive years with the exception of one in the position of Secretary or of Chief Financial Officer, who may serve so long as he or she continues to serve in such office. Fred (Frederick J.) Reiss has served in this office almost since the establishment of the Foundation and continues so to serve. Directors who have previously completed their six consecutive years of service more than a year ago, and have been recently re-elected to the Board are Rabbi Hillel Cohn, Maureen Godfrey, Ed (Edgar C.) Keller, Ada Kellers, Willard Monninger, Shelby Obershaw, and Martha Pinckney.

Also serving on the Board at this time are Blythe Anderson, Ruth Chafin, Jeffrey B. Johnston (President), June McDade, Sunny Rabenstock, and Fred (Frederick J.) Reiss, The Honorable Cynthia Ludvigsen and Marty Kamper.

It is anticipated that a portion of the income, but none of the principal, of the first $500,000.00 will be distributed to the Library within the coming year and that portions of the income from the endowment fund will similarly distributed in ensuing years. However, a significant portion of the income will also be added to the endowment fund as the Foundation approaches its next goal of $1 ,000,000.00.

Ed (Edgar C.) Keller
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