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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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MUSSER LIBRARY MORPHING INTO NEW KIND OF LIBRARY

Private donations, public investment join together to create “Library of the Future”

MUSCATINE, Iowa – Like a caterpillar turning into a butterfly, the Musser Public Library is about to morph into a new kind of library and at a new location. After two years of study and painstaking research into the needs of the community and of the library, Musser Public Library will be moving from its present location at 304 Iowa Avenue to its new home at 408 East 2nd Street.

Pam Collins, Library Director, had a vision of what she thought the current library could be given the restrictions of the current available space and lack of adequate parking.

“We were limited in what we could do in expanding our services to fit the needs of the community and the lack of off-street parking made it hard for those who want to come to the library to come,” Collins said.

Estimates to remodel the existing building came in at between \$10 million and \$16 million, a number which made the library and City of Muscatine staff shake their collective heads.

“Putting that kind of money into this building at this time just didn’t make sense but we didn’t have too many choices,” Collins said.

That is until Gary Carlson, vice-president of community relations at HNI Corporation, approached the library with a rather unique idea. Why not use the current HNI Corporation

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headquarters as the new home for the library since HNI was remodeling an existing building as their new corporate headquarters.

That unexpected gift in December 2015 came at just the right time for the future of the library. OPN Architects of Cedar Rapids, one of the leaders in library construction and remodeling, was brought on board in January 2016 to provide a feasibility study on transitioning the headquarters into a library at a relatively small cost. That study indicated that the move was feasible and the donation was formally presented to the City Council on Aug. 25, 2016.

“The current library lacks capacity and capability, and construction of a new library is simply not economically feasible,” Carson told the Muscatine City Council at the special council meeting. “HNI is willing to donate 408 E. 2nd Street to the City of Muscatine to become the new HNI Community Center and the Musser Public Library. “

OPN Architects was again retained to develop a remodeling plan.

“The problem was that there was no model like this for us to look at,” Collins said of the library transformation. “What we can do with this building is a whole different way of looking at being a library.”

OPN Architect Bradd Brown stated in a June 12, 2016, guest editorial appearing in The Gazette of Cedar Rapids, that somewhere through the years libraries lost their connection to the community and became more collectors of collections.

“Today, we have come full circle,” Brown said in the editorial. “Libraries are re-embracing their role as community connectors intent on content creation, openly designed to bring in natural light and allow for a user-friendly environment.”

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Libraries, Brown contends, “offer infinite potential for dreaming, growing, planning, discovering, and investigating.” He offers some details of what he calls the “Library of the Future” and Collins agrees change for the future is needed.

“The new library will be all about the experience,” Collins said. “And it will serve as an anchor for the east end of Downtown Muscatine, providing space for existing community programs and activities along with programs created by the library.”

The HNI Community Center and Musser Public Library will have 10,000 square feet more space than the current library home greatly increasing the opportunity for programs and meetings to be hosted in the new building. Increased hours of operation will also be a benefit along with a dedicated parking area.

The library portion will not house as many collections as they do today but will have rotating collections that will change every three months. The library will also be much more automated than it is today with self-checkout areas and self-pay areas. A new web site will also accompany the move with increased opportunities for library card holders.

“Much of what we have at the current library will be at the new library but some will not,” Collins said. “We are reinventing what we offer and how we can be more community oriented. It is an exciting time and I know that the people of Muscatine will thoroughly enjoy what is available to them.”

The planning for the library move has taken many twists and turns in the past two years but Collins believes the plan is set and the venture is ready to move forward.

“We have a good plan for the move and are just waiting for the final pieces to be put into place,” Collins said. “Our goal is to be open in the new facility by the end of May 2018.”

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One of those pieces is funding for the move. The Roy J. Carver Trust awarded the HNI Community Center and Musser Public Library a \$550,000 grant to be used for the updates and move which took care of a large part of the estimated \$1 million project. The City of Muscatine has already budgeted funds for the transition and included the Musser Public Library as part of a Community Attraction and Tourism (CAT) grant application.

The rest of the money will have to be raised through private donations into the Musser Library Building Fund. Details about how to donate to that fund will be made available once the paperwork to establish the fund has been completed.

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