

# MODERNIZATION

## (1999-PRESENT)

<sup>1</sup>The 1990's once again saw tremendous growth in Sun Prairie. The population in 1990 was 15,333. By 2000 that number had grown to 20,369, an increase of over 32%.<sup>2</sup> The dramatic rise in population led once again to overcrowding in the library and a need for increased service to the growing sectors of the city. 1994 to 1995 alone saw an increase in circulation of over 5%. Traffic surrounding the Windsor Street library was fast becoming one of the most congested areas in the whole city. Those who were actually able to find the nondescript library, noted the president of the library board Jean Bjorensen, "were often dismayed enough that they ended up utilizing other libraries at a considerable distance from Sun Prairie." With a booming population and an aging building, interest in a new library facility began to intensify.



*Sketch of the proposed new library.*

eventually this forced the abandonment of the Kohl's site. At this point the committee switched directions and sought to find a plot of land to build a new facility. The committee soon found a site across from Sheehan Park that was purchased by the Sun Prairie Area School District from the city. The original sale stipulated that if the school district decided not to use the land for a new school they would sell it back to the city. With the site secured, it was time to raise some money.

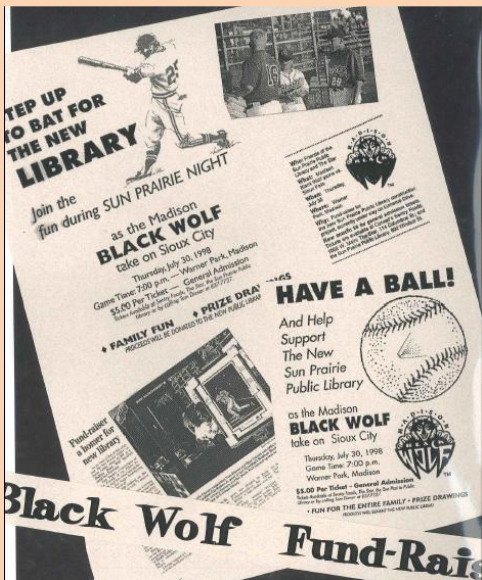
The city came up with a \$5.6 million dollar, 36,000 square foot building plan with \$2 million of that expected to be gained via fund-raising. If the \$2 million could not be raised it was a distinct possibility that the building plan could be changed to account for the loss funds. Budget planning for 1998, when the new library was anticipated to open, was tight with the city council debating over streets funding or library funding. Luckily, the fund-raising effort met with huge success. The committee organized raffles, drives, shirt sales, dinners and numerous other events. The committee also created an opportunity for donors to give to specific



*Sun Prairie residents and committee members gather outside the purchased library plot.*

<sup>1</sup> Information for this page was found in the scrapbook *Making It Reality* compiled and organized by Lois Blanchard (former employee of the library, now deceased) with the assistance of Sharon Zindars (library director 1995-2007). The scrapbook is available at the Sun Prairie Public Library.

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.usbeacon.com/Wisconsin/Sun-Prairie.html>



*Fund-raising efforts*

portions of the library, such as the lobby, youth area, or computer lab. This idea was latched on to by both private and corporate donors. Companies like American Family (\$50,000) and General Casualty (\$25,000) joined in. Private donations were common as well, including a large \$150,000 donation from Walter Renk in honor of his late wife Martha Meier Renk (which is the name of the quiet reading room of the library). The largest donation came from the neighboring town of Bristol which gave \$250,000. With donations like these the fund-raising committee was able to reach their goal of \$2 million. Ground was broken for the new library on March 31, 1998.

The current Sun Prairie Public Library opened to the public on May 17, 1999. The new facility was exactly what the burgeoning city of Sun Prairie needed. There were separate areas for children and adults to read. Instead of having one room used for board meetings, story time, offices and storage space there were individual rooms for each.

The local cable access group had their own section of the library; there was a coffee shop, screened in porches, and a fireplace. The new library was brought up to speed technologically with a self-check machine and state of the art wiring. This library was everything the previous library was not: spacious, welcoming, and impressive. Within the first month 150 new library cards were issued and 250 were renewed. Circulation also jumped in that first month by 25 percent.

From a couple of bookshelves with 200 books in the corner of a room to a collection of over 100,000 items in a 36,000 square foot facility, the Sun Prairie Public Library has come a long way. The library would be nothing however without the people who worked in them to keep them running, and with the support of the community. It was the initiative of a local women's group that started the library, the gift of a citizen that gave the library its first building, and the donations of thousands that enabled the current library to exist as it now does.



*Ground breaking ceremony. Director Sharon Zindars is on the right.*



*Sun Prairie Public Library after construction is completed.*



*Sun Prairie Public Library as it stands now (2011).*