

# Ensuring Regional Prosperity

The City of St. Cloud is constructing the new public library *building* using money from a regional sales tax. Securing funding for the necessary equipment and services to turn that building into a *library* is our responsibility.



The new St. Cloud Public Library begins to take shape in downtown St. Cloud.



By  
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**A**s the new St. Cloud Public Library takes shape in downtown St. Cloud, it is clear the critical role it will play in the community. It will help satisfy the region's growing thirst for knowledge and help build a more skilled workforce that will ensure regional prosperity.

Our area citizens are seeking out more and diverse sources of information through the local public library. St. Cloud citizens checked out 662,000 items from the St. Cloud library in 2006, borrowing 21 percent of all materials for the entire Great River Regional Library (GRRL) system. As dramatic as this number is, it is expected to increase another 50 percent – to 1 million items – within the first 18 months in the new library building.

Libraries really are where people come together to discuss and exchange ideas. With nearly twice the square footage in the new library building, imagine the expanded collections, computers, meeting space and other infrastructure that will fully engage citizens in their search for new ideas and diverse information sources.

Community development of this scope relies on public-private partnerships. In this library partnership, the City of St. Cloud is constructing the building through a regional sales tax. Securing funding for the necessary



The new library building will have nearly twice the square footage as the previous facility. Volunteers are launching a fundraising campaign to outfit the new library with the media collections and technology essential to meet the growing needs of the region.

equipment and services is the responsibility of GRRL, which operates the St. Cloud library and 31 other branches in a six-county region.

A group of volunteers from the business community and public sector have stepped forward to help the library launch its "Library Plus You" fundraising campaign and outfit the new library with the media collections and technology that are essential to making it a facility that can meet the growing needs of this community.

As lifelong educators and co-chairs of the fundraising campaign, Dr. Bernice Berns and I know the striking impact libraries have on

the intellectual, financial and social capital in a community. For us, libraries are about access to information and ideas for all people – helping unleash individual potential and foster connections that enhance quality of life. The public library provides *the place to go* for professionals doing research, parents fostering a love for reading in their children, or people learning a new language.

Combined, Bernie and I have more than 70 years of helping young people learn through reading. We know excessive television and computer screen time can alter the hardwiring of children's brains and hinder the brain's

Citizens' information needs don't stop with books. St. Cloud library usage for other purposes is increasing at a rapid rate, too:

>> Internet usage has increased **117 percent** since 2000 to more than 1,000 weekly Internet sessions

>> More than **12,000** youth and adults visited last year for story hours, school visits, meetings and other programs

>> More than **1,500** children participated in the Summer Reading Program in 2007 – a **73 percent** increase from 2006!

ability to problem solve - a critical skill for our future workers. On the other hand, reading strengthens the brain's pathways to higher level thinking processes. Libraries ensure that *all* children have this opportunity and help foster a competitive workforce for decades to come.

As this pillar rises to take its place alongside all of our downtown assets, picture the excitement and energy from people who can truly experience everything this state-of-the-art facility will offer. With thousands more books, 60 more computers, an expanded Children's Library, a dedicated space for teens, and a language learning lab, our new St. Cloud Public Library will truly be a source of community pride and another sound investment for all of us. **BC**

Dr. Marjorie Hawkins is co-chair of the Library Plus You fundraising campaign.

Photos provided by Great River Regional Library