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Beloit leaders welcome center

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Under the hot sun in front of the old Beloit Public Library Tuesday morning, several members of the community welcomed the creation of the Hendricks Center.

The 48,000-square-foot facility, a gift to Beloit College from the late Ken Hendricks and Diane Hendricks, will be transformed into an educational facility for the arts.

"The Hendricks family has once again expressed confidence in the future of Beloit — both the city and the college," said James Sanger, chairman of the Beloit College Trustees. "The new Hendricks Center is contained in a wonderful landmark of downtown Beloit that has served the community well for decades and now will gain a new life, serving new generations both in the community and at the college."

Once renovated, the Hendricks Center will be home to Beloit College's music and dance programs and other campus educational activities. Community outreach programs and workshops also will be held there.

"This unique structure, with its studios, teaching areas, and public spaces, will match the finest arts education facilities available at the leading colleges in the nation, expanding Beloit's arts offerings and educational opportunities," Sanger said. "Through outreach programs and workshops, it will also augment the arts offerings available to young people in the community and help to inspire a new generation of artists and audiences."

Beloit College interim President Dick Niemiec thanked Diane Hendricks and her associates for their generosity and flexibility in bringing the project to fruition and said he was looking forward to returning to Beloit for the opening of the new facility at the start of the 2010 academic year.

"The Hendricks Center is a superb example of the generosity, cooperation and unified vision that has helped to build and sustain Beloit," Niemiec said. "It will join the new Center for the Sciences as a defining element of Beloit College's 21st century campus, attracting students and outstanding artists and faculty, and inspiring a new generation. It will evolve over the coming years into one of the most important centers of its kind in the region."

In her comments, Diane Hendricks said Tuesday was the day many had spent years working for.

"We've now completed another one of Ken's dreams," she said, thanking everyone who made the project possible.

Corporate Contractors Inc. President Brad Austin said it was Ken Hendricks' dream to have all buildings in Beloit bustling with people, and that the new facility would bring more people into the community.

Rob Gerbitz, managing director of Hendricks Development Group, said the Hendricks Center is a great addition to the downtown area, and the Hendricks Development Group will keep working to grow the downtown area and Beloit as a whole.

Last to speak was Beloit City Manager Larry Arft, who said the library announcement was the second to last in a series of events highlighting the growth of the community. Last weekend was the ribbon-cutting of both the renovated Fairbanks Flats and the new Turtle Island II.

The new Hendricks Center, Arft said, will help to enhance the recruitment of the top high school graduates seeking a liberal arts education. He hopes all community members have gotten the chance to see the new Beloit Public Library, one of Ken Hendricks' visions. Another important part of that vision was filling the space left at the old library, Arft said.

By next summer, the building should be ready for summer programs with college classes starting in August 2010.

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