

## PRESS RELEASE

### REYNOLDS FOUNDATION CAPITAL GRANT

The Donald W. Reynolds Foundation has awarded the city of Durant a grant in the amount of \$7,982,870 for a new community center and library.

The grant announcement was the culmination of a long process begun by the trustees of the Robert L. Williams Public Library more than a decade ago. Dennis Garrett is chair of the trustees; Paul Buntz is vice-chair and Betty Boynton is secretary; other trustees are Juliet Cathey, Gayle Gaither, Eleanor Lee and Fran Mickle. Over the years the trustees canvassed the community, formed planning committees, and wrote five year plans in preparation for a new library; Alice Moore, head librarian, and her staff did everything possible to make the community aware of the need for more space and a better facility.

Six years ago State Senator Billy Mickle was preparing to retire from the Senate, he obtained a generous grant from the state, and with those monies the trustees began to be hopeful a new library was possible. Local real estate professionals donated their time and expertise, and with the cooperation and hard work of the mayor and city council, property was purchased suitable for construction. The properties met and exceeded guidelines set out by the Oklahoma Department of Libraries and would later be a great asset in the grant application process with the Reynolds Foundation.

In early 2004, Paul Buntz, who was city manager at the time, received a survey sent by the Oklahoma Municipal League (OML) to twenty communities throughout Oklahoma inquiring about the need for a community center in that city. Buntz didn't know it at the time, but the Donald W. Reynolds Foundation had contracted with OML to determine the need for community centers in medium size cities in rural Oklahoma. This survey could easily have been tossed along with the reams of mail that flowed across his desk, but it piqued Buntz's interest, and he completed the survey. In July of that year the Reynolds Foundation contacted Buntz to inform him Durant was one of the communities which completed the survey, and they would like to visit Durant and explain the new Foundation Community Centers Initiative. This visit occurred later in the summer; Buntz then brought the program to the attention of the library trustees, the mayor and the city council, and their response was, "Let's go for it." Since then the community has come together to fulfill each step of the planning process needed to qualify for a Reynolds Foundation grant.

The Foundation gave Durant a generous stipend to hire consultants to assist the city through the various stages of the grant application process. The first step was to form a Community Needs Advisory Committee. This committee was made up of Dennis Garrett, SOSU President Glen Johnson, Billy and Fran Mickle, Faye Self, Melissa Story, Rip Tidwell, Mayor Jerry Tomlinson, Paul Buntz, Ron Cross, Wanda Johnson, Michael Miles, Joyce Northcutt, Dot Phelps, Mike Ridgway and Leslie Webster. This committee's assignment was to make sure the greatest needs of the community be met.

The Oklahoma Community Institute was hired to do a needs assessment survey; the response was enthusiastic, and those surveyed were adamant that Durant's greatest need was for a library and community center.

When Durant was invited to apply, more committee members were needed because the grant application was twenty pages of detailed questions concerning all aspects of the community: type of city government, , relationships of various institutions, financial responsibility, impact of the project on the community and on the county, and the community's hopes, plans, and dreams for the future. Billy Mickle was chair of the Grant Application Committee, and he broke the application into sections and assigned them to specialized committees. Those committees were Gayle Gaither, Dennis Garrett, Fran Mickle, and Leslie Webster for the first section of the application with Fran serving as chair; the next section was assigned to Paul Buntz, chair, along with James Dunegan, who had replaced Paul Buntz as city manager when Buntz retired, Ralph Houser, Mayor Tomlinson and Rip Tidwell. The various committees then had to wait to see if Durant would be invited to present their case in front of the trustees of the Donald W. Reynolds Foundation.

When Durant was invited to present its grant application, the letter of invitation was cautionary; it reminded the committees this was another step in the process and did not ensure Durant would be chosen a recipient. It also set out guidelines for the presentation—only two speakers, one of whom needed to be the mayor and the other the grant application chairman. Time was limited to twenty minutes with a ten minute question and answer period. There could be no videos, but there would be three easels available for charts and graphs.

Two new committees needed to be formed: a script committee with Gayle Gaither serving as chair, along with Fran Mickle, Melissa Story, and Mayor Tomlinson as members; also a "charts and graphs" committee that would make displays with vital information; that committee was headed by Paul Buntz backed up by Dennis Garrett, James Dunegan, and Ralph Houser. Durant thought it had a good case, a good cause, and a good representation to prepare the proposal.

Mickle and Tomlinson made it clear to the Foundation Trustees that they were "spokesmen for an entire community," They felt they represented countless numbers of people who had dreamed big dreams and who had worked diligently to make those dreams reality. Every organization, every individual who contributed in some way, needs to feel good about this announcement—it is evidence of a community working together to make a good thing happen for all. Thanks to the generosity of the Donald W. Reynolds Foundation the quality of life for residents of this community and this county will be vastly improved.

We are in the final stage of completing all agreements with the Foundation. Once all agreements are finalized we plan to complete facility design details and anticipate the start of construction late 2008.

The Donald W. Reynolds Foundation is a national philanthropic organization founded in 1954 by the late media entrepreneur for whom it is named. Headquartered in Las Vegas, Nevada, it is one of the largest private foundations in the United States. The Foundation funds projects that enhance and enrich the lives of people in the states of Oklahoma, Arkansas, and Nevada.

For additional details and updates please visit our internet site @ [www.durant.org](http://www.durant.org)

Dated: 6/27/2008

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