

A Crown Jewel for Downtown Gallup

Written by By Tom Hartsock Sun Correspondent
Friday, 27 November 2015 07:15



When the planners for the Arts & Cultural District first got together, several items jumped onto their agenda immediately, but none so well needed as a new library. The Octavia Fellin Library building is over 60 years of age and has far outgrown its usefulness, so much so that a Children's Branch was added a block away in the old bank building down Second Street to handle the overflow.

That is not a good thing, as it separates adults from their children, and besides, the bank was not constructed to hold the weight of books – approximately 170 pounds per foot – needed to fill the shelves. Other problems became evident as well, including adequate space for the ever-growing numbers of computers for cardholder needs, accessible meeting rooms of varying sizes, space for art and other programs to assist in the learning process, and a host of other, smaller needs that libraries must have in the 21st Century.

Speaking of which, focus groups have recently noticed that the words “library” and “museum” have decidedly negative connotations, especially among the younger generation. Contemporary curators of both recognize that their institutions need to be living centers of active learning and community gathering places in which the subjects to which they are dedicated are brought to life. Thus, a name change is not just expected, but demanded, in the future.

The next decision of the planners was location, and they believed that it would be imperative to keep it near the center of the Arts and Cultural District, as an anchor if nothing else. However, with the latest proposal that a new learning center be placed on the north side of Aztec Avenue and west of Second Street to the parking lot of Dental Innovations, the anchor could and should turn into a “Crown Jewel.”

If the current Children's Library was razed and a new two-story (at least) edifice was erected in that spot, the Arts and Cultural District would have a centerpiece among the Second Street

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Event Center, El Morro Theater, City Hall, and the County Courthouse. The vibrant nature of a majestic building in this area would only increase the value of the buildings around it, either intrinsic or market. And the community value will rise as well.

The artist's conception of this building is simple, but elegant. The current walkway from Aztec to Coal would be kept in place but would feature a raised pedestrian crossing to connect to the parking area across to the south side of Aztec. The crossing area would also be well lighted for safety with blinking yellow lights to warn vehicles to slow down or stop for pedestrians wanting to cross the wide avenue.

"In my career, I've been involved in working with about 10 new libraries," said Mary Ellen Pellington, director of Library Services in Gallup. "I am excited to use my expertise and talent in working with the City of Gallup on a newly designed, 21st Century building."

So far, the plans are merely conceptual, but Pellington does expect to double the number of computers at a minimum and has many other ideas firmly implanted in her mind after a lifetime of experience and success as a head librarian.

She has been in Gallup only seven years but has greatly increased the respect our small town has earned by winning national awards from associations where she competed with libraries across the country, many of them in much larger cities.

Initial plans call for approximately 40,000 square feet of space, but nothing is set in stone at this point.

"This is a long-range plan with many steps involved," Pellington said. "I want to make out progress as smooth as possible toward the end result."

Whatever the final result, our next generation will benefit from having a completely modernized attraction in a convenient and pleasant setting in which to learn and study about this marvelous world where we live.

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