2001 Endowment Fund Report

Full Steam Ahead!

2001 was a year of great upheaval both in our nation and in the stock market. In the midst of these rocky seas, the Murphy Library Endowment fund foundered like many other funds that had investments in the stock market.

As the market continued its slump from the previous year, the fund took a big hit in the first and third quarters of 2001, but registered gains during the second and fourth quarters. The balance at the beginning of the year was $205,232. The ending balance of the fund was $197,944, which does represent a downturn compared to previous years. One can only hope that the trend seen in the last quarter of 2001 will continue well into 2002 and that the fund will go full steam ahead to earn significant profits as it has in earlier years.

Why the all the water metaphors? Because the highlight of the year centered on a major fundraising project—the commissioning of a historic painting of a La Crosse river and steamboat scene by Michael Blaser. (See detailed article on the verso of this report.) This project netted the fund approximately $10,000 by year’s end. Additional contributions and fundraisers added another $7,655. These other fundraising efforts concentrated on a grocery receipts program, begun in the summer, and a Barnes and Noble book fair, held in August.

The primary mission of Murphy Library is to support the university's dynamic programs of teaching, research and public service. Donors to the Endowment Fund make a significant contribution to this goal by enhancing the staff's ability to select, maintain, enhance, promote, and make accessible information, materials and research resources.

Thirteen years of generous donations to the Murphy Library Endowment are having a real impact on library collections and services. Every year since 1995--when expenditures from the fund began to be considered--has seen a steady increase in projects funded. The majority of the $8,861 expended this year went toward enhancement of the collections.

The steady growth of the Endowment Fund is mainly attributable to the generous support of donors from the La Crosse area and beyond. Our bottom line attests to the fact that contributions are the backbone of the fund, especially in bad economic times. The contributions of friends, UW-L employees, and library staff signify a belief that the library is central to the teaching and research mission of the university and an important educational and business resource in the community.

The university has truly benefited from the generous contributions that come from people like you. The staff of Murphy Library would like to take this opportunity to offer our most sincere thanks. Your tax-deductible donations to the fund make a major difference in providing the library with the means to keep up with our users' ever-changing information needs. The Endowment Fund is a pledge of excellence, shared by donors.
The Michael Blaser Project

In 2000-2001, the Murphy Library Endowment Fund commissioned a well-known marine artist, Michael Blaser, to paint a historic painting of the La Crosse waterfront. Over his career, Mr. Blaser has painted an impressive portfolio of historic river and lakefront scenes portraying steamers and vessels from the 19th and 20th centuries and featuring such cities as Cincinnati, St. Louis and St. Paul. His research entails studying a series of historic photographs from that period and place to recreate the moment on canvas. Murphy Library’s collection of inland riverboat photographs, some 45,000 images, has provided the source materials for many of Blaser’s works.

Edwin L. Hill, former head of Special Collections, familiar with Blaser’s work, first suggested in the mid-1990s that the Library’s Endowment Committee investigate commissioning a work depicting a historical scene of La Crosse. This idea finally took root and the project was officially launched in 2000 with the generous support of several donors and in partnership with the UW-L Foundation. Emerson and Jean Wulling, George Gilke, and Ed Hill, all long-term supporters of the Library and the Endowment Fund, provided the funding to commission the work.

Early in 2001 Michael Blaser determined the basic composition and began to prepare the initial sketches for the painting: first a pencil sketch, then a color “cartoon.” Blaser met with individuals from the library and community who have a keen knowledge of local history to refine the details. The scene chosen was one showing the excursion steamboat Avalon docking at the La Crosse levee in the late summer of 1950. The finished work was unveiled at a reception held October 18, 2001 at the Cleary Center.

Now the painting, August Moon: The Steamer Avalon Arrives at La Crosse, 1950, has been completed and hangs in the reading room of Special Collections—close to the images that helped to inspire it. Limited edition prints, signed and numbered by the artist, have been reproduced on museum quality stock and are available for purchase. Proceeds from the sales of August Moon are deposited in the Murphy Library Endowment Fund. To request a brochure about the painting or to order a print, call 608-785-8511. You may also visit the web site: http://www.uwlax.edu/murphylibrary/blaser/ for more information about the painting and Michael Blaser.

With the Michael Blaser painting and prints, La Crosse has gained an impressive image that celebrates its river history. At the same time, campus and community library users will benefit from the funds raised for the Library’s Endowment Fund that translate into stronger library programs and collections.

If you have questions about the Fund or wish to make a contribution, please contact Christine Prucha, Department Chair (608) 785-8637.