

These Walls: The Old Downtown OKC Library

by Kelley Chambers

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OKLAHOMA CITY – The old downtown Oklahoma City library may not look like much now, but a lot of history is connected with the building, and the site.



The former downtown Oklahoma City library building is up for some renovations. (Photo by James Keathley)

The current building, at 132 Dean A. McGee Ave., was built in the early 1950s, but a library had sat on the site for many years before that time.

The building replaced the city's first library, the Carnegie Library.

An account from the Oklahoma City Metropolitan Library System found that the city's library in fact began with a women's study club in the late 1800s.

The Philomathean Club was formed in the city in 1889 by the wives of area merchants. Its members set about assembling a club library.

Determined to establish a public library, the club members next set about to petition wealthy citizens, often their husbands, to fund a library.

The women's clubs, with the financial help of wealthy philanthropist Andrew Carnegie, began establishing libraries around the country. Carnegie would pay for the libraries, which numbered 1,681 by 1923, but he required local communities to staff and maintain and buildings, and supply a collection of books.

As the Philomathean collection grew in Oklahoma City, members realized the need for a dedicated building for the public library.

After raising the needed \$25,000, the club chose a site on the northeast corner of Third Street (later Dean A. McGee Avenue) and N. Robinson Avenue.

Fort Worth architect Marshall R. Sanquinet designed the building, and the cornerstone was put in place on Aug. 16, 1900.

The building was completed in 1901.

Over the next decades the library grew both its collection and need for space. Carnegie gave the library an additional \$35,000 and the city chipped in \$4,800 for a building expansion in 1909.

Decades later, the library became too small to accommodate the growing city, which led to the formation of the Friends of the Library association, formed in 1945.

The group rounded up funds to the tune of \$500,000 to build a new library at the existing site.

In 1952 the Carnegie Library was torn down.

The building seen today opened in 1954.

It served the city for years, but was also witness to the federal building bombing on April 19, 1995. The federal building was less than a block north of the library.

The building sustained damage, mainly to windows, and reopened more than a month after the bombing.

That branch served as the main library until it was replaced as part of Oklahoma City's MAPS project.

In 2004 the gleaming new Ronald J. Norick Downtown Library opened at 300 Park Ave. and the old library went dark.

Since that time the library has sat vacant until last year when plans were presented to the city to purchase the building and renovate it for a new use.

Developer Judy Hatfield has plans to convert the building to condominium, retail and office space.

Work is set to begin soon on what will be called the Carnegie Centre, a nod to the roots of the Carnegie Library that once sat on that corner of downtown.

The Journal Record profiles a significant Oklahoma City or Tulsa building in "These Walls" every Monday and Tuesday.

Norman developer looks to renovate former Downtown library building

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1/7/2008

After nearly three years of planning, local commercial real estate developer Judy Hatfield and sons, Dray and Dak Hatfield, have been given the go-ahead to move forward on their Carnegie Centre mixed-use project at the old Downtown library, 131 Dean A. McGee.

During December's Oklahoma City Downtown Design Review Committee meeting, the project was given a go by all involved.

Hatfield said she named the project "Carnegie Centre" after the city's first Downtown library, which occupied the site for more than 50 years. The building has been vacant since 2004 when the Ronald J. Norick Downtown Library opened a few blocks away.

"I've been living it and breathing it," Hatfield said of the project. "We've done our homework and we're doing this because it's the right thing to do for Oklahoma City. When we're done, everyone will be proud of it."

The four-story, sand-colored brick building totals 65,000 square feet at 12,000 square feet per floor. Hatfield says old book shelves are currently being removed, and asbestos will be removed from the building in early January. Then demolition will begin with renovations following. When complete in 2009, the building will have a glass and steel exterior to complement Downtown's evolving look.

Plans are for offices and a private fitness facility to occupy the building's lower level and commercial for it's street level. Hatfield said already she has been talking to an urban bank about taking space at the site.

Enclosed parking and storage for residents will be available on the second floor, and the rooftop will be accessible by all owners for entertainment.

Third and fourth levels will consist of 18 condominiums of various sizes and configurations. Balconies will be added for tenants to gather around and view Downtown Oklahoma City's skyline.

Because the building will be renovated into mixed-use, Hatfield explained that prices for condominiums will start as low as \$165,000 per unit and up to \$750,000.

"We've got office, commercial and residential, so based on the location and the view, that's how we determined the price for each unit," she explained. "I've set prices based on the value of each condo in the project."

Hatfield says she plans to occupy a unit herself in the building.

"There's 25,000 people who work within about six blocks – that part is just amazing," she said. "Another 15,000 people work over at the Health Sciences Center. And from here to Nonna's, it's eight minutes. You don't even think about how quickly you walk from one place to another in Downtown Oklahoma City.

"This is a true Downtown hub."

As plans for the project developed, Hatfield said she's tried to be a good neighbor by keeping her nearby property owners informed about what would be coming to their neighborhood.

Our team consists of architectural firm Beck Design, project manager Nabholz Construction and Hatfield's sons, both of whom have followed in their mother's commercial real estate footsteps. Completion of improvements to the limestone building is expected in spring 2009.

"We've worked very closely with the city's finance and planning departments to make this a win-win for everyone, especially Downtown," Hatfield said, adding that no public funding is involved.

OKC Market Snapshot

May 2008



Oklahoma City Recognition

- Oklahoma is the sixth least expensive state for travel, according to a survey released by AAA. Oklahoma City ranks as the fourth least expensive city for travel among the 49 large cities surveyed. The estimated budget for two adults for lodging and meals in Oklahoma City is \$194.69/day, while the national average is \$244/day.
- Oklahoma City placed 4th on the Forbes.com list for Best Cities for Commuters. Forbes.com looked at the 75 largest metro areas in the U.S. and evaluated them based on traffic delays, travel times and how efficiently commuters use the existing infrastructure.
- The Women's College World Series is being held in OKC from May 29-June 4 at the ASA Hall of Fame Stadium on the northeast side of town. The softball tournament brings national exposure on ESPN and millions of dollars to the OKC economy.

New Store Openings / Hirings

- Homewood Suites by Hilton, opened its newest property on May 9 at 6920 W Reno Ave. in OKC.
- Foster's Nursery and Tree Farm opened on May 2 at 7600 SW 119 in OKC.
- A full-service Bank of Oklahoma branch opened at 5509 N Pennsylvania Ave. in OKC.
- St. Anthony Hospital opened its first YourCARE Clinic in the Homeland store at 7107 NW 23 in Bethany. A YourCARE clinic will open at 9225 N May Ave. later this summer, along with other clinics in south OKC and Norman.
- Tulsa-based Sun City, an alternative energy company, has expanded into Oklahoma City selling solar energy systems. They are located in Country Village, east of N May Avenue and Grand Boulevard.
- AAA Member Services announced that it is planning to build a 198,000 square-foot customer contact center in Oklahoma City. The center will have 1,200 employees with 85 to 90 percent being new hires. The center will be built in the Quail Springs Office Park in northwest OKC and is slated to open in late 2009.
- Valliance Bank opened its second location in Norman at 702 Wall Street.
- Praire Thunder Baking Co. opened a bakery in MidTown's Plaza Court in OKC.

Real Estate

- There were 1,427 residential sales closed in April 2008, down 17.3% from the 1,725 closed in April 2007.
- The average residential sale price for a home purchased in April 2008 was \$146,303, down 2.2% from the April 2007 average of \$149,607.
- In the metro, the average interest rate at residential closing was down 10%, from 6.01% in April 2007 to 5.41% in April 2008.
- The average number of days on the market for a home was up 6.0%, from 83 days in April 2007 to 88 days in April 2008.

Source: OKC Metropolitan Association of Realtors

Automotive

- New car and truck registrations in the Oklahoma City DMA were down slightly 0.14% in March 2008 compared to March 2007. There were 6,287 new vehicles registered in March 2008 and 6,296 in March 2007.
- There were 7,008 used car and truck registrations in March 2008.

Source: Polk Automotive Intelligence

Will Rogers World Airport Air Traffic and Service

- April 2008 passenger counts were up 5.42% from counts in April 2007. There were approximately 151,162 commercial passenger departures in April 2008 compared to 143,391 in April 2007.
- 2008 year-to-date passenger counts are up 7.6% over year-to-date 2007.

Source: Will Rogers World Airport press release

Unemployment

- In the OKC metro, the unemployment rate for April 2008 decreased to 2.9% from March's rate of 3.3%. In April 2007, the metro's unemployment rate was higher at 4.0%.
- Statewide, the unemployment rate for April 2008 decreased to 2.9% from March's rate of 3.3%. In April 2007, the state's unemployment rate was higher at 3.9%.
- Nationally, the seasonally adjusted unemployment rate for April 2008 marginally decreased to 5.0% from March's rate of 5.1%. The national unemployment rate for April 2007 was lower at 4.5%.

Source: U.S. Dept of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics

Retail Trade

- Total retail trade in the MSA for all of 2007 was up 5.0% over the same period in 2006.
- The only category that showed a decline in 2007 over 2006 was Lumber & Hardware with a drop of 3.6%.
- Two categories showed a gain greater than 10% compared to 2006: Liquor (+10.3%) and Estimated Gasoline (+19.1%).
- All other categories showed single-digit gains: Food (+0.8%), Electronics/Music Stores (+5.5%), Drugs (+8.6%), Eating / Drinking (+4.8%), Used Merchandise (+0.3%), General Merchandise (+4.7%), Furniture (+4.7%), Auto Accessories and Repair (+4.3%), Miscellaneous Durable Goods (+5.1%), Miscellaneous Non-Durable Goods (+0.03%) and Apparel (+4.9%).

Source: OU CEMR

Tax Collections

- Statewide, Oklahoma tax collections for April 2008 were down compared to April 2007 numbers. Total April tax revenue for the state was \$654.8 million, a 3.5% decrease over April 2007. Total tax revenue is comprised of net income tax, gross production, sales tax, motor vehicle tax, and other tax sources.
- April 2008 sales tax collections were \$110.7 million, down 17.8% over April 2007 collections.

Source: Oklahoma Office of State Finance



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