



## **Let There Be Light: The San Diego Foundation Encourages Philanthropic Support for a New Central Library**

The engraving over the door reads, "Let there be light," and it is beneath this message that the general public entered Andrew Carnegie's first library in his homeland of Scotland. To Carnegie, libraries represented houses of knowledge and self-improvement, and were subsequently adorned by rays of light to symbolize the opportunity of enlightenment for all. Through his vast steel wealth, Carnegie was ultimately responsible for the development of over 2,500 "Carnegie libraries" in the United States and abroad. Ultimately, Carnegie left the world with a multitude of literary repositories and established an important library legacy -- that of philanthropy.

San Diego is an intimate part of that generous history, as the initiation of our own Central Library was largely dependent on Carnegie himself. With the help of *The Wednesday Club*, Lydia Horton, wife of Alonzo Horton, appealed directly to Carnegie for construction of a library -- the effort ultimately resulted in San Diego receiving the first Carnegie library in California. It is in celebration of this heritage that The San Diego Foundation recognizes the library's critical role in our city and, thereby, endorses efforts to strengthen and revitalize our New Central Library. For hundreds of years, libraries have played a key role in providing free access to informational resources, creating a brighter future for all. While Carnegie was the first benefactor, the long-term survival of public libraries depended upon the collaborative efforts of both private donations and civic participation.

San Diego is a city where generosity has long been practiced and appreciated, and we are reminded by Carnegie's longstanding contribution to the libraries of the world that generosity never loses its value. The San Diego Foundation actively supports private giving to bring the New Central Library vision to fruition. For those who are able, now is an opportune time to create a new legacy and make a critical donation that will be assured a significant return on investment for this generation, and for generations to come.

While some may argue that tough times demand cutbacks in library resources, literary great, Anne Herbert, reminds us, "libraries will get you through times of no money better than money will get you through times of no libraries." It is during such slowdowns that the role of the library is elevated, as Americans become increasingly reliant upon the abundant resources it

provides. Rather than vanishing into obsolescence as simply a provider of books gratis to the public, the modern library offers an array of beneficial services and goods. Libraries are unique as suppliers, free of cost, of Internet access, books, DVD's, and other entertainment to those who would otherwise go without. Libraries increase literacy, offer resources for life and employment searchers, enhance computer skills, and often provide free workshops to hone job skills.

Libraries foster a sense of community at a time of increased solitude where text messaging, email and social networking separate individuals from direct contact with each other. Libraries break down these barriers as instruments for civic and cultural exchange, by offering a safe, educational, and positive location for members of the community to convene. The 35 branches of our library system contribute greatly to this function, creating settings for neighbors from across our county to meet, while engaging in personal enrichment. As the nucleus of the library system, improvements made to our Central Library enhance the quality of the branches as well. In recognition of their crucial function, The San Diego Foundation supports a project that respects the branch libraries and recognizes the critical role of a Central Library in supporting these branches.

Cities that have improved their central libraries have experienced net new business activity in areas near the library, and have experienced a greater number of visitors to the library from a larger radius. Businesses in close proximity to libraries have listed the library itself as a reason for relocation. Local businesses often rely on public libraries for business research purposes.

Libraries not only contribute to the quality of its people, but also to the greatness of a city itself. Quality of Life indexes often employ the number of "books per capita" in their calculations, while library systems are also used as a factor in a city's overall literacy rankings. Libraries attract knowledge workers and the creative class and those seeking their employment. Returns from dollars expended on public libraries provide immeasurable inherent economic value to our community in the form of contributions to learning, literacy, business productivity, personal and professional development and individual livelihood.

We all remember our first library card and how it opened up a world of opportunity and wonderment, and with that, new responsibilities — in a library, children have the chance to explore how to become an astronaut, a veterinarian, or how to sail a boat, build a model airplane, or become a model citizen. While libraries are places that evolve as we evolve -- a place where we can enjoy group storytime as kids, while checking out books on dinosaurs and ponies, to a place where childhood passions turned into hopes for the future. Libraries have an intrinsic value, not only by providing free materials, but by inspiring generations to read and embrace the culture of education.

Let us not lose this opportunity to harness the many gifts that a modern library has to offer and in doing so, bring San Diego into the forefront of achievement. A New Central Library contributes to our downtown revitalization efforts, enhances the appeal of our city's hub, and supplements

our reputation as a place of thought, innovation, and creativity. Let us follow in the footsteps of Lydia Horton, *The Wednesday Club* and Carnegie himself. The San Diego Foundation thereby embraces Carnegie's mission of creating a more illuminated public and encourages philanthropic support to honor this tradition through private giving.

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