

Photo by Gary Nieter, Times-Union

The exterior of Bell Memorial Public Library is mostly complete

Mentone Library Hits Funding Snag

BY RUTH ANNE LIPKA
Times-Union Staff Writer

MENTONE - While the eyesore previously known as the Frank Manufacturing building on Ind. 25 in Mentone is being transformed into an attractive structure, problems with financing are looming for the new Bell Memorial Public Library.

Bob Murphy of R.P. Murphy and Associates, Larwill, is the grant administrator for the project and he reports that \$250,000 of Build Indiana Fund money that was promised to the project in the state's 2000 budget will not be forthcoming anytime soon. The problem stems from the state's current financial condition, Murphy said, and the expected funding has been frozen.

The library project, including purchase and renovation of the building and furnishing the completed combination of library, day care center and senior citizen center, was estimated at \$1.2 million.

"We're not going to be able

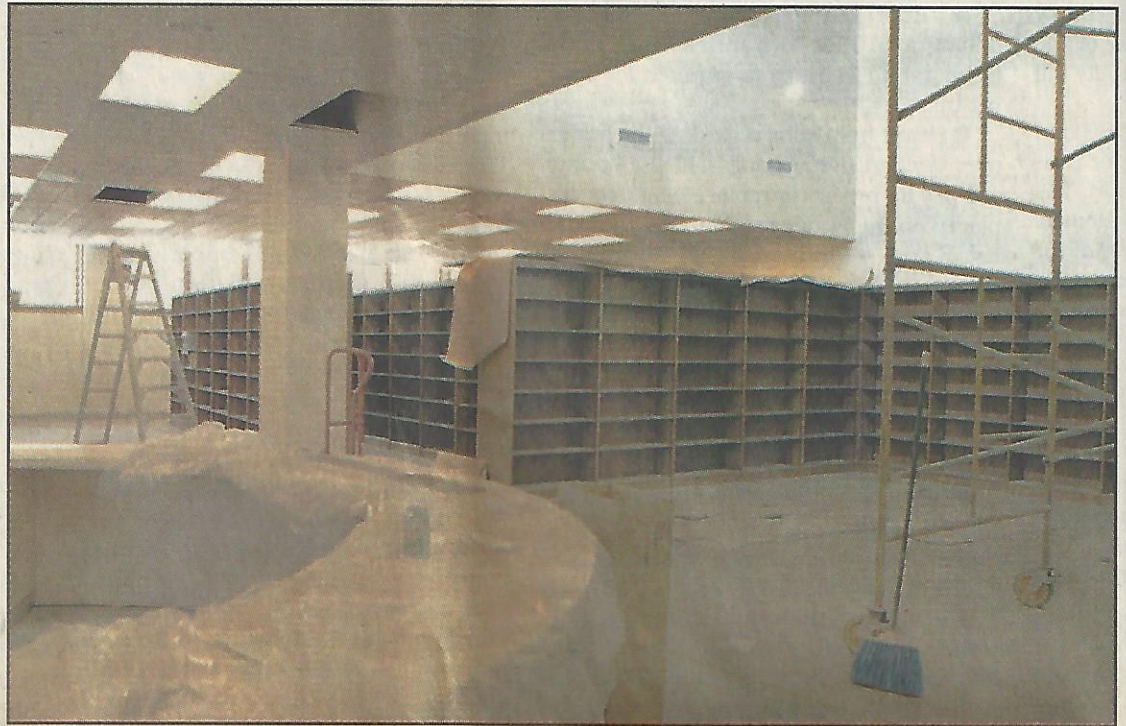


Photo by Gary Nieter, Times-Union

The library's interior needs significant funds for completion.

to do much in the way of help," said Mentone Town Council President Ed Rock, who was not aware of the change in funding until contacted by the **Times-Union**. "From the town's standpoint, we'll do what we

can do, but it's probably not more than we've already committed for. ... Obviously, we're going to have to go to the public and ask for money."

Because of statewide funding cuts, Rock said, "unfortu-

nately, we're (the town of Mentone) in the same shape as every other government entity in the state."

The town will use Economic

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The grants are administered by the town on behalf of the library.

Despite this setback, Murphy said, "We'll get the money somehow, someplace, somewhere ... it's a matter of time."

Already, the town/library has been awarded a \$15,000 matching grant from the Kosciusko County Community Foundation. The community, through its library board and chamber of commerce, is conducting fund-raisers to garner the \$15,000 required as the match. One fund-raiser, set for Feb. 25 at Mentone School, is a Longaberger basket bingo. A maximum of 200 tickets will be sold and tickets are available by calling Pam Brower, Mentone Day Care Inc. president, at Farmers State Bank, 353-7521.

Also, Murphy said he sub-

mitted a grant request of \$52,657.86 on behalf of the project to K21 Foundation on Jan. 28 and is writing grant applications to submit to Dekko Foundation (due March 28) and Saemann Foundation (due April 1).

He will submit a request for \$50,000 in Neighborhood Assistance Program credits from the IDOC when the state accepts applications later this year. NAP credit applications are accepted every two years, Murphy said.

Through the NAP program, businesses are solicited for donations and are given credit toward their Indiana income tax - for every \$100 donated to the day care center in the library, "the company gets to write \$50 directly off the bottom line of what they owe in state income tax," Murphy said.

The donations also are tax-deductible.

The NAP credits being sought will be used for supplying the kitchen furnishings in the day care center, including cabinets, countertops and appliances. From the various sources, Murphy is seeking a total of \$234,294.61, with \$199,029.61 needed for the day care, \$25,265 for the senior citizen center and \$10,000 for the library. The costs are for furnishing the library and its occupants. The building renovation is expected to be completed in time for the library to occupy the facility by March 1.

"Right now, we'll have a building," Murphy said. "Then I need to supply it."

Murphy said the most money is needed for the day care and senior citizen center because the library is "in better

shape because it is tax supported."

None of the money being requested is duplicated on any grant application, Murphy said. Any grant money received that is not needed to finish the project will be placed in a tuition reserve account to be used to help pay for low-income families who cannot afford the day care rates (a sliding fee schedule will be used). Mentone Day Care Inc. is a nonprofit corporation.

Dekko already has committed \$17,050 to hire the first day care executive director, a position expected to be filled later this month or early next month. The additional grant requests from the various sources for the day care will be for playground equipment and mental acuity supplies (including books and toys) for the overall develop-

ment of physically and mentally healthy children, according to information provided by Murphy.

"If the grants come through, I don't feel there's going to be a problem," Brower said. "We are just looking for as much help as we can get to try to get it open and better the community."

It is hoped that the day care center - the only state-licensed facility in Mentone - will be in operation by July 1, with accommodations to serve 48 children. It is anticipated that 51 percent of the children served by the day care will be from low- to moderate-income families.

For the senior citizen center, the needs include tables and chairs, a refrigerator and stove and miscellaneous furnishings.

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 Development Income Tax money to help support the library complex; the town council approved in August 2000 to pay \$2,000 per year for 20 years from EDIT funds. EDIT is income tax money that can be used only for capital projects and improvements.

In addition to a \$500,000 grant from the Indiana Department of Commerce for renovations, the town committed the requisite local funds of \$638,868.18 by Bell Memorial Public Library from the Capital Projects Fund and general obligation bonds.

It took the library six years to get the project off the ground, beginning with a community-needs assessment (1996-1999) and working with Murphy and the state to acquire funding.

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