

\$1 million gift kicks off Westport Library transformation campaign



Contributed photo Christian J. and Eva Trefz

The Westport Library announce a \$1 million-dollar gift made in support of the Community Campaign for the Transformation Project by longtime Library donors and Westport residents Christian J. and Eva Trefz.

“Chris and Eva’s astounding leadership gift to the Library’s Transformation Project is an example of their extreme generosity and philanthropic hearts, and based on their good fortune and business acumen,” said Westport Library Executive Director Bill Harmer. “Chris and Eva are clearly committed to this project due to their love of Westport, where Chris has lived for close to four decades. We are beyond grateful for their profound support of this project.”

“We saw the plans for the project and were instantly inspired by the extraordinary flexibility, innovation and bold vision for the future evident in the design,” said Trefz. “We feel that under Bill’s leadership the Library has the direction necessary to bring this exceptional plan to life. We are honored to have the opportunity to participate in this way and look forward to seeing the many ways the community benefits from this remarkable new Library.”

In recognition of the generous gift, the Forum (currently the Great Hall) will be named after Christian J. Trefz. The Forum will be one of the most flexible spaces in the new Library. Its vast open floor plan is designed to support everyday Library use for research, work and study, as well as access to popular materials and a broad range of patron services. The space will also be able to be easily transformed to seat up to 600 people for large events and programs.

The Trefz brothers' story began in 1957, when Chris worked alongside his brother Ernie at Roessler's Meat Packing Company in Bridgeport. With newly-opened McDonald's restaurants quickly becoming their largest customers at that time, Chris and Ernie were inspired to pursue careers as McDonald's franchisees. On September 27, 1964, their first McDonald's, in Waterbury, CT opened for business.

Trefz and his family operate 45 McDonald's restaurants in Connecticut and New York. For over 50 years, Chris and Ernie received numerous awards from the McDonald's Corporation for their outstanding restaurants and community service. These include the elite Golden Arch Award, an accolade earned by less than 1% of McDonald's franchisees, of which there are 38,400 worldwide. They brought love and dedication to each of their McDonald's restaurants every single day and were great role models and an inspiration to all who have worked for them.

Members of the Trefz family were among some of the founding chairpersons of Ronald McDonald House Charities in Connecticut and New York, and continue to serve as Board Members. Chris, a Director of the Norwalk Hospital Foundation Board, and Eva are long time Norwalk Hospital Foundation donors. Their generosity created the Hospital's new Christian J. and Eva W. Trefz Lobby and registration area. The couple's most recent gift established the Christian J. Trefz Family Endowed Chair in Global Health at Western Connecticut Health Network. This program creates the first endowment of its kind in the State of Connecticut, and will serve to expand global health awareness and education for aspiring physicians in perpetuity. It is only one of a limited number of hospital-based endowed global health chairs in the nation.

In addition to the Trefz family, there are many generous donors in the community who have supported this project and make up the Library's Cornerstone Society. The Society was established in 2014 to recognize those generous, committed individuals and organizations who have made extraordinary gifts of \$250,000 and above to the Transformation Project. The Cornerstone Society supporters include: Howard J. Aibel, the Nancy Jones Beard Foundation, Kathryn Frazer Brooks, the Estate of Patricia Lauber Frost, the Komansky Foundation, Inc., John Kossak and Evelyn Kranes Kossak, Paula and Tom McInerney, Frances and Alan Offenber, Roz and Bud Siegel, the Estate of Jerry A. Tishman, Christian J. Trefz and Eva W. Trefz, and the Michael M. Wiseman and Helen A. Garten Charitable Foundation, as well as several anonymous donors.

To celebrate the dedication of these benefactors, unless they wish to remain anonymous, their names will be inscribed in a permanent location in the renovated Library. Name recognition will be given in the Annual Report and Campaign publications. They will be honored at private receptions during and after the Campaign and will have a place of honor at the ribbon-cutting and dedication ceremonies of the transformed Library.

Construction is scheduled to begin on the \$19.5 million-dollar renovation project in September and will last for approximately 18-21 months. The work will be done in phases to keep the Library open and accessible to the community, and the project will not change the footprint of the existing building. The renovated Main Level will feature an increased number of conference rooms and quiet areas, an enlarged Library Café, a professional, state-of-the-art recording studio, a larger dedicated MakerSpace and a HackerSpace workshop with prototyping equipment and co-working space. The Upper Level will transform to include more conference rooms and the balcony will be expanded to provide open study and work spaces. This larger balcony will become mezzanine seating for larger programs in The Forum.

Funding for the Transformation Project is being provided by a variety of sources. Public dollars from the Town of Westport were approved in January of 2017 when the Town's RTM unanimously approved the allocation of \$5 million for the initiative. The town's funding will cover the cost to replace the dated and inefficient mechanical systems - the HVAC, plumbing and elevator - which are original to the 1986 facility. The Library applied for and received a \$1 million dollar grant from the Connecticut State Library. The bulk of the funding is being raised by private donors. To date, the Library has raised over \$17 million for the project. First County Bank is providing bridge financing for the project.