

AARP: Fountain City Little Free Library proposal wins AARP Small Dollar, Big Impact grant

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FOUNTAIN CITY, Wis. – A proposal to convert an old unused office space just off the lobby area of the historic auditorium into “The Nook – a Little Free Community Library” has been selected to receive one of AARP Wisconsin’s “Small Dollar, Big Impact” grants.

These grants are being awarded monthly in 2020 to projects in communities across Wisconsin that are designed to improve communities and make them better places for everyone to live, work and play as they age.

“I am so very excited to be one of the AARP’s Small Dollar, Big Impact grant recipients, especially as we head into the winter season,” said Fountain City Mayor Gwen Katula. “This has put all the gears in motion and making a dream become a reality. We cannot wait to share a library with our community. The Nook is small scale with big potential.”

Judges selected this project for a \$1,000 grant after reviewing dozens of proposals submitted from all over the state. With the grant money and the efforts of several enthusiastic volunteers, the city plans to clean out and paint the office space, add shelving, and stock The Nook with an assortment of books, games, videos, magazines, and newspapers for residents of all ages.

The judges said the project takes a community need for a public library and offers up a “very attainable solution.” They said it addresses a gap in the community and could have long sustainability with this initial investment. Katula said that one of the things most lacking for Fountain City residents is

enrichment opportunities. “And right now during the COVID crisis our residents need it more than ever,” she said.

The nearest free library for Fountain City residents is 20 miles away in Alma, WI. Winona, Minnesota is only nine miles away, but requires Wisconsin users to pay a \$45 out-of-state membership per year.

Like many communities across the state and country, Fountain City has seen widespread cancellations of festivals, plays, sporting events, and other activities that bring the residents of the city together. The Nook is a unique way to safely provide the community with activities during the COVID pandemic.

“For example, we will create “Grab & Go Kits” for all ages. Think crafting, STEM, game night, movie night, and other fun themed kits that anyone could check out,” Katula said. The Nook would also create outdoor fun activities like a winter scavenger hunt and virtual events such as Storytime with the Mayor.

“One of the kits I am really excited about is a ‘Who Done It’ mystery kit, where players can get creative and dress in costume at home to play along. Winter and COVID might keep our residents homebound more than ever. Having a resource right within the community would be hugely beneficial,” Katula said.

The idea for The Nook is supported by the city’s Park/Rec Committee and the Fountain City Business and Community Group. The grant will launch the project into a rapid planning stage. Future additional funding for the project would come from fundraising. The mayor hopes to eventually grow this grassroots library into a full-scale library offering services for all the residents of the city.

The Nook project fits perfectly with the spirit and intent of the grant program, said AARP Wisconsin State Director Sam Wilson. “Our goal is to support communities as they make positive changes that inspire long-term progress on livable issues. This project hits that nail right on the head.”

AARP Wisconsin’s “Small Dollar, Big Impact” grants are being awarded once a month from June through November. All projects must be completed within 60 days from winner announcement.

“These grants are exactly what the name describes – short-term, low-cost

solutions that could have remarkable impacts on the shaping of neighborhoods and cities,” said Darrin Wasniewski, Associate State Director of Community Outreach for AARP Wisconsin.

“There are so many great ideas and proposals for making life better in communities across Wisconsin. We know how impactful \$1,000 can be. This is our way of extending some seed money to get these projects off the ground.”

The grant program is open to some nonprofits and government entities. For more information on the program, visit www.aarp.org/wi