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Reimagining Academic Library Fundraising: An Evening at the James E. Brooks Library

by Molly Allen

Fundraising for academic libraries can be achieved in a number of ways—through outreach, the cultivation of donor relationships, a strong rapport with an institution's alumni relations department, and many others. Although these fundraising strategies are successful, they do not typically bring donors back into the library to see the results of their donations.

In January of 2014, the staff at the James E. Brooks Library at Central Washington University (CWU) began

planning for its first-ever Annual Brooks Library Gala and Silent Auction – An Evening at the Brooks. It was the first time an event of such caliber had been held, or even suggested, at the Brooks Library, and library staff were eager and determined to take on the challenge. Three amazing months of planning, teamwork, and creativity culminated in the Brooks Library hosting their first annual Gala in April 2014 as the kick-off for National Library Week.

April 9th, 2016, marks the third annual Brooks Library Gala and Silent Auction. The Gala, as it is called by library staff, has become the library's most prominent fundraising event. This gathering of campus faculty, staff, and students, as well as the local community, brings attendees into the library for an evening of music, art, poetry, dancing, and a silent auction with offerings from businesses throughout Kittitas County. The Gala welcomes collaborations across campus, inviting CWU's Wildcat Shop, Music Department, Art Department, the chefs in its Catering Department, and many more to work on this incredible event.

The Gala offers the community the opportunity to view the library in a different light. The event turns all four floors of the brick library into a truly vibrant social space, providing an unforgettable evening for attendees and showing guests that the library is no longer just a quiet warehouse for books.

A string quartet welcomes guests on the first floor as soon as they walk into the building. The second floor hosts the dining, silent auction, and jazz combos, serving as the central hub of activities. Campus Catering and the planning committee provides an incredible



Art on display in the Government Documents Department at the Brooks Library Gala.

array of hors d'oeuvres and desserts in one of the most popular daily collaborative spaces for students. The juxtaposition of offering food, desserts, and wine within a typical study space serves to demonstrate to attendees and students that the library is a relaxing and fun place to spend their time. Following welcoming speeches from CWU President, the CEO of the Kittitas County Chamber of Commerce, CWU Dean of Libraries Lenny Price, CWU's jazz combo fires

up their tempo, providing great music as guests peruse the silent auction. Showcasing local wares, the silent auction items are donated by Kittitas County businesses. The Kittitas County Chamber of Commerce plays a significant role each year in the solicitation of auction items, as well as assistance with planning and marketing the event.

The third floor, which houses the Government Documents Department by day, serves as the ideal space for the installation of an art gallery representing CWU student work, curated by Art Department faculty, as well as a hub for poetry readings by local authors throughout the night. As the evening progresses, guests make their way to the dance floor on the fourth floor of the library, set up right in the middle of the stacks. CWU's own student swing dancing club, the Swing Cats, provide lessons as guests dance to the tunes of the Ellensburg Big Band.

This annual event brings together the best of Kittitas County. The Gala serves as a truly unique showcase of what the James E. Brooks Library has to offer and displays a way of fundraising that many academic libraries have yet to explore. The event has not only been profitable in raising funds, but has also been wildly successful in bringing people into the library that believed the Brooks Library was only open to students.

The Gala has fostered convivial relationships with many local businesses; breaking down the "town and gown" issues that are faced in many college towns. The evening is a wonderful celebration of the library's successes and serves as a toast to the future as library employee's work toward the library's mission of stimulating creativity, intellectual curiosity, and facilitating lifelong learning and research within the communities that the James E. Brooks Library continues to serve. 📖

Molly Allen is the Secretary Lead for the James E. Brooks Library at Central Washington University.