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## Work on library's Blender Cafe begins

By AUSTIN MONTGOMERY Staff writer  
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Austin Montgomery/Beloit Daily News During the groundbreaking event for the Blender Cafe, Beloit School District internship liason Tony Cappozziello (left) and Blender Cafe Manager Angie Sanchez (middle) show the cafe space ahead of renovations to Beloit School District Business Services head Jamie Merath.

BELOIT — Work on the Blender Cafe is underway. Multiple community groups came together Monday to usher in construction with a groundbreaking ceremony at the Beloit Public Library, showcasing the strong area partnership.



The restaurant will allow students from Beloit Memorial High School's hospitality program to gain on-the-job training and career development options before graduation. The partnership could also lead to business students getting involved with marketing aspects of the cafe. The cafe in the library is anticipating a May opening.

As the construction effort ramps up, so have the administrative planning efforts behind the project. Last week, the library announced the hiring of the restaurant's manager, a former BMHS grad and Beloit native. Fifteen students will assist manager Angela Sanchez in operating the store. Tony Cappoziello, School District of Beloit Apprenticeship liaison for Blackhawk Technical College, will help oversee students transitioning through the process, while guiding the cafe's longterm business efforts.

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Currently, all students are working on training at the high school from food preparation skills to menu comprehension and task management, Sanchez said.

"We are so excited to finally be at this point," the new manager said.

"This has been an effort two years in the making," Cappoziello added.

Library Director Nick Dimassis said the effort signals a renewed redevelopment effort for youths in Beloit, and the director referenced the opening of the Hendricks CareerTek in his remarks given Monday.

"Because of the library's relationships in the community, I would call this the Eclipse Center Campus," Dimassis said. "There's a lot of exciting things happening here as well. The Blender will be a feeder system for BMHS."



The new manager will be tasked with hiring and fostering relationships with students on staff and promoting efforts between the school's hospitality program and Kerry Inc., a sponsor of the project. Graduates of the "Blender Program" also will be eligible for college scholarships to culinary arts programs.

In total, 11 private contributions were made, while monetary and logistical donations between the Hendricks Family Foundation, Kerry and Starbucks helped secure needed supplies for opening the store.

The Hendricks Family Foundation provided \$80,000 ahead of the opening; Kerry donated the cafe's kitchen gear and will supply inventory for the project. Starbucks pitched in to furnish the new cafe, once opened. Some civic groups involved in the effort include the Friends at the Beloit Library and Beloit's Rotary Club. The library group donated \$10,000 specifically for the project, while the group plans to donate \$20,000 in general donations to the library in the future. In December, the Rotary Club donated \$10,000 to the project.

"Those individual contributions are probably the greatest testament that The Blender is going to have a positive impact on Beloit," Dimassis said. "To have that many donors give at that level means they believe this is a powerful opportunity for our young adults."

Funds for the effort also came from the city, while matching funds were provided by the library. In total, construction on the project is estimated to cost about \$200,000, and construction will be completed by Klobucar Construction. Renderings were designed by Angus Young & Associates and Architects Kristi Reuter and Joe Stadelman.

The city gave \$100,000 for the construction, but no further city funds will be designated for the cafe. Previously officials said the cafe must sustain itself, while students will be compensated while working at The Blender.

“The business has to succeed in order for the program to succeed,” Dimassis said. “We can’t just run it and pay the bills on good intentions. We have to make sure the business succeeds.”