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A rendering of the new library in the village of Cambridge, which breaks ground next month.

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## Doug Moe



Doug Moe writes about Madison and the people who make it a unique place. His column runs Mondays, Wednesdays, Fridays and Sundays in the State Journal.

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The new \$1.8 million library for the village of Cambridge, set for a ceremonial groundbreaking next month, is a triumph of volunteerism, hard work and persistence, but what fun is that?

I'd rather write about ice cream and cookies.

Both played a role in the new Cambridge library. The ice cream is a bit of a stretch, but bear with me.

It starts more than a century ago with a Cambridge kid named Ole Evinrude, who liked to row a boat across Lake Ripley on hot summer days to get his girlfriend an ice cream cone.

At least, that's one version. In another, Ole, whose family came to eastern Dane County from Norway in the 1880s, had moved to Milwaukee and was on a lake west of that city with his rowboat.

The point — yes, finally — is that in both versions, the ice cream melted. Ole needed a faster way to get across the lake, and so he invented the outboard motor.

This did not make the Evinrude family poor.

Recently, the Cambridge Library Capital Campaign Committee solicited the Ralph Evinrude Foundation, based in Milwaukee, for a donation. Ralph was Ole's son. The foundation's letterhead includes the image of an ice cream cone. Better yet, the letterhead that arrived in Cambridge was accompanied by a check for \$7,500 toward the new library.

As for cookies, their involvement with the library goes back only two decades. It was around 1995 that the Friends of the Cambridge Community Library, seeing a space crunch on the horizon, established a "future fund" for a new library facility.

They weren't adverse to large gifts, but the reality seemed to be that the money coming in was from craft fairs and bake sales.

One day, a volunteer turned to Friends president Mary Gjermo and said, “We are building this library cookie by cookie.”

It was Gjermo, a native of the Cambridge area and a one-time professional librarian, who in 2009 convinced Bob Salov to take over as chairman of the stymied library capital campaign committee. Salov, a supervisor on the Dane County Board, lives in Christiana and served on the Dane County Library Board.

Together — Gjermo became committee vice-chair — they forged a three-pronged strategy that called for raising roughly \$600,000 each from foundations, municipalities and private sources such as the Friends organization. (The Friends’ “future fund” had raised around \$350,000 at that time.)

They worked hard, filing grant applications, convincing towns and villages near Cambridge to pass advisory resolutions supporting libraries (which would make it easier, later, when they asked them for money) and continuing to bake cookies and otherwise raise funds privately. Nobody said it was going to be easy.

“There were many, many late nights,” Salov said.

A big hurdle was crossed in April 2012 when the Cambridge Village Board — with some new members, more sympathetic to libraries — pledged \$400,000 to the library project and moved the timetable for the pledge up from 2016 to 2014. Major grants also came from the Cambridge Foundation, Cambridge State Bank/John T. Vucurevich Foundation, the Madison Community Foundation and Wisconsin Economic Development Corp.

It’s worth noting that Cambridge’s effort to get itself a proper library goes back decades, if not quite all the way to Ole Evinrude’s rowboat.

In the 1960s, there was a small public library that had its collection mixed in with the high school library. The library got its own small space in 1978. The building was empty commercial space, and fairly spartan. Volunteers brought toolboxes to build the bookshelves.

In 1990, Cambridge built a community center with 2,100 square feet upstairs reserved for the library. It was still not ideal. The first circulation desk was a folding card table.

By the mid-1990s, Gjermo said, “We knew we needed more space.”

That led to the formation of the “future fund” in 1995, and in 2004, the library capital campaign committee, which had plateaued at \$350,000 until the new, recent push.

Salov’s efforts to get the surrounding villages and towns on board — presumably their residents would get a lot of good out of the library — began bearing fruit in 2012 and 2013. If Christiana and Deerfield were on board, why not Rockdale and Oakland? There was a domino effect.

Still, it was hard. Small communities have tight budgets. In March 2013, the Oakland Town Board met to consider the Cambridge library campaign committee’s request for \$110,000. Salov was in attendance. The board chairman chided him a bit for doing “a great job of pitting communities against each other” in the campaign.

The chairman said he considered libraries “non-essential,” causing a gasp from one audience member. In the end, Oakland gave \$70,000 to the Cambridge library.

The goal of \$1.8 million has nearly been met, and construction will begin this spring. “We’re sliding into home,” Salov said, though some \$80,000 remains to be raised, and donations are still being accepted.

For Gjerme, it’s a dream come true. “Sometimes this seems unreal,” she said. “I wasn’t sure it would be built in my lifetime.”

Let me be the first to suggest ice cream and cookies at the grand opening.

Contact Doug Moe at 608-252-6446 or [dmoe@madison.com](mailto:dmoe@madison.com). His column appears Monday, Wednesday, Friday and Sunday. [\[related content\]](#)[{/related content}](#)

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Hi Bob -

I enjoyed meeting you, and I am glad the column was OK. Best of luck going forward. Hope the people who are going to get so much good out of the library appreciate the hard work of the people who made it happen.

Best,  
Doug