



KAXE Morning Show

Bright Spot: Grand Rapids library finds support in a tough year

By Jennifer Penn Stone-Hay



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Contributed / Grand Rapids Area Library

Grand Rapids Area Library director receives a check from Sue Waite and Kay Peck in memory of their relative Greg Waite on Sept. 8, 2026.

After a 25% reduction in its budget for 2026, the staff at Grand Rapids Area Library look ahead to next year after receiving a \$50,000 donation.

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GRAND RAPIDS — It's been a tough year for local libraries. Hours have been cut in Bemidji, Grand Rapids and, most recently, in Virginia.

But in Grand Rapids, a recent gift of \$50,000 has reportedly blown away Director Amy Dettmer.

In early September, Dettmer received a call from family members of Greg Waite, a mural artist who visited the library at least once a week to check out DVDs and chat with staff. Dettmer learned Waite had died, and his family wanted to donate in his memory.

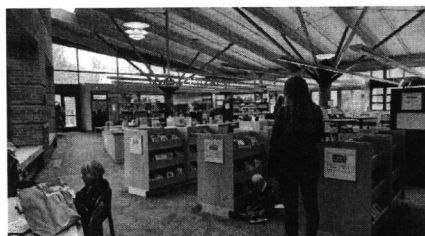
When she heard the donation amount, she said she nearly "fell on the floor."

A few days later, family members Sue Waite and Kay Peck presented Dettmer with the check.

"I started to cry. They started to cry," Dettmer said in a recent *Bright Spot* conversation on the *KAXE Morning Show*.

"Because it's going to change what we can do next year," she continued.

The Grand Rapids Area Library has been open three days a week in 2026, down from five the year before. Staff has condensed their work into less time with the same number of people coming through the door, according to Dettmer.



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Megan Buffington, October 30, 2025

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"The number of items that are getting checked out per hour is astronomical," Dettmer said.

At a city council meeting on Sept. 14, Grand Rapids Mayor Tasha Connelly said library fundraising efforts have brought in over \$273,000.

She said the city hopes to expand the library's hours as many as six days a week, including some Saturdays, beginning January 2027.

Connelly also acknowledged the generous contribution from Waite.

"The community has really showed up for the library," she said, "and we thank Greg and his family and all the patrons who have donated to the community foundation."

There are three ways to support Grand Rapids Area Library. The Friends of the Grand Rapids Area Library raise money through book sales and a used book store. Those funds provide for current needs, such as a recent drinking fountain replacement.

The Grand Rapids Area Library Foundation is supported through an endowment and money is distributed each year for materials and other special projects, such as the library's summer celebration for families. Last fall, a special fund was set up at the Grand Rapids Area Community Foundation that is specifically earmarked for 2027 and 2028 operations.

With the donation from Waite's family and the operations fund, the library should be able to add at least one day per week to its schedule next year. Dettmer is working with Grand Rapids city administrator Tom Pagel on what that will look like.

Listen to our full conversation above to hear more details on how libraries are funded and how you can support your local library.

Is there a Bright Spot in your community? Let us know!

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