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Memorial Library Honoring Kurt Vonnegut Jr. '44 to Open in Indianapolis

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BY [DANI NEUHARTH-KEUSCH](#)

More than three years after his death, Kurt Vonnegut Jr.'s '44 family, friends and fans are coming together to celebrate his life and legacy. The Kurt Vonnegut Memorial Library — set to open in his hometown of Indianapolis on Nov. 12 — will showcase the author's compelling life history and influential works, laced with dark humor and satirical themes that spoke to the "rebellious youth" during Vietnam and still resound today.

The library is entirely devoted to Vonnegut. In part, it will be a library in the classical sense, displaying all of Vonnegut's novels and some of his personal favorite reads. The space will also act in part as a museum, displaying personal artifacts donated by the Vonnegut family, like his Purple Heart from WWII, his typewriter and a ceremonial German sabre Vonnegut acquired during the war. The library will also showcase some of Vonnegut's less-celebrated visual art.

"I think it will be full of who he is — his books, his art ... his genius," his daughter Nanny Vonnegut said. "His creativity, to me ... was staggering."

Rodney Allen, a member of the library board of directors and author of two books about Vonnegut, said he thinks Vonnegut's international fame will attract people to the library.

"I think it will be a very important cultural center," Allen said. "There are a few notable Indianapolis writers — like Booth Tarkington — but in terms of recent well-known authors, Vonnegut is going to be recognizable to millions of people ... I think it is going to be a huge draw."

According to Allen, the idea behind the library came from Vonnegut's devoted fan base.

"Julia Whitehead, our executive director, who lives in Indiana and was a big Vonnegut fan ... decided it was time for Vonnegut to have something in [his hometown of] Indianapolis, so despite her day job, she's been really slaving away at this project for a couple of years now."

Kip Tew, the vice president of the board of the directors, said funding for the project has come "from everywhere we can get it," citing a generous fan base and a supportive local community in Indianapolis.

"We would like to expand the scope of the mission to include educational outreach ... [to] make sure the ideals [Vonnegut] wrote about are in the public discourse," Tew said. "We think a very important legacy that he left is a respect for the importance of the written word, and we want to make sure that that view continues."

The library is currently partnering with Short Ridge Junior High School in Indianapolis, Vonnegut's alma mater.

"Our hope is that both inside the city [and beyond] that people will continue to recognize what a treasure Kurt Vonnegut was," Tew said.

The library board will preview the library on Nov. 11, Vonnegut's birthday, before it opens to the public the next day.

According to Allen, not all the exhibits are entirely completed, but "[we are] on our way," he said. One exhibit will include a 20-foot long, five-foot high mural depicting the timeline of Vonnegut's life.

Though most famous for his writing, Vonnegut was an artist in several arenas, including drawing, painting, sculpture and music, Nanny Vonnegut said.

"He was very broad in his interests. I think [the library] will reflect his eclectic nature," Nanny said.

Nanny is an artist by trade — as is her sister, Edith Vonnegut — and Nanny's work is currently showing in two galleries. Their brother Mark Vonnegut, a pediatrician and writer in Quincy, Mass., described himself in the preface to his book *Eden Express* as "a hippie, son of a counterculture hero, B.A. in religion, (with a) genetic disposition to schizophrenia."

"My father was very nervous about us being artists because the chance of actually making a living is slim," Nanny said. "The older I got, the more I came to appreciate what he went through to get through where he got, [but] we were so steeped in [art] growing up that there was no steering us away."

Nanny recalled finding it odd that her father never got dressed up and left the house to go to work, like their neighbors did. He would stay at home, she said, wearing "sneakers with no socks and a raggedy cardigan."

"He certainly did not fit in to the times or with any of our neighbors," Nanny said. "I wasn't embarrassed, really, I just thought, 'He's weird.'"

As per the vision of its directors, the Kurt Vonnegut Memorial Library is intended to be a celebration of Vonnegut's legacy to his countless fans — notwithstanding his own children.

"[Dad] taught me to try and be original in my thinking," Nanny said. "His message was always of kindness."

Vonnegut was Sun Associate Editor in 1943. In his address at The Sun's 125th Anniversary celebration in 2005, Vonnegut said, "The Cornell Sun, thank goodness, showed me what to do with my life, and I did it."

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