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## Honoring an author Attorneys among those preserving Vonnegut's memory

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IL Staff

Almost three years ago, Indiana lost one of its best known writers and native sons – at least outside of the Hoosier state. Readers from around the world know him for his dark humor and peculiar take on life that critics have called both cynical and optimistic at the same time.

There is even a beer and an asteroid named for Kurt Vonnegut Jr. A recent Google search of his name yielded more than 2 million results, including countless fan pages, interviews, and quotes from his 14 novels and 10 collections of short stories and essays.

While he's not unknown to Indiana residents, at least not among those who have connections to his family and have read his works, Vonnegut hadn't lived in his hometown for decades and rarely returned.

But a few dedicated fans of the late author and humanist, including a number of attorneys, have taken it upon themselves – with the blessing and cooperation from Vonnegut's surviving relatives and his estate – to create the Kurt Vonnegut Memorial Library in Indianapolis.

The library was officially announced at German Fest at the Rathskeller in October, just outside of the Athenaeum that Vonnegut's grandfather designed. Since then, the board of directors discussed plans to memorialize Vonnegut with literary events, educational programs, and eventually a physical space that will house his personal effects and books.

Supporters said that the library will not only be there for Vonnegut fans but to support the growing cultural scene in Indianapolis. And the library will not only be a space for fans to see Vonnegut memorabilia, but there will also be a gallery of his art, a reading library of his books and related materials – not to be confused with a lending library – and a space for public lectures and events.

Kip Tew, vice president of the board and a partner at Krieg DeVault, said ideally they'd like to have the library somewhere along the cultural trail in downtown Indianapolis, or at least not too far from the area in order to be a destination for tourists.

They'd also eventually like to offer a tour of Vonnegut-related places in Indianapolis, said Tew and Executive Director Julia Whitehead, a writer for Eli Lilly who is not an attorney herself but is married to an assistant attorney general who has helped with ideas behind the scenes.



*Kip Tew, left, is president of the board for the Kurt Vonnegut Memorial Library. Julia Whitehead, executive director, has been working with Vonnegut's family.*

While Indianapolis already draws tourists for various events, Tew said, the library would be one more reason to visit, one more cultural destination for those who would come to the city anyway.

Among those stops would be Vonnegut's alma mater, Shortridge High School, which was recently transitioned from a middle school back to a high school that serves as one of a handful law and public policy magnet schools in the U.S.

David Jose, another partner at Krieg DeVault's Indianapolis office, said the Shortridge connection is one of his favorite goals of the organization.

Jose said Tew asked him to get on board because they work together and Tew was familiar with the work he does for his practice. Jose said he was excited to work with a non-profit organization from the ground level, which was rare for him.

Another reason Jose wanted to work with the library was, unknown to Tew, Jose's father was friends with Vonnegut even before they were classmates at Shortridge. There they had worked on the school paper together. Their families also knew each other, Jose said.

"I think it's just another example of how Indianapolis is just a big small town," he said.

Even though Vonnegut died in April 2007, Jose said he was glad that his father, now in his late 80s and living in Richmond, and others who knew Vonnegut personally were still alive to see this tribute to the late author.

While Jose's dad didn't view Vonnegut as a hero or idol like those who were working on the library, Jose said his dad was pleased to learn of their efforts to honor Vonnegut's memory by bringing attention to the places in Indianapolis that were also important to him, such as the high school.

Among those efforts will be speakers at the auditorium to talk about Vonnegut and his work, and to restart the student newspaper. The library's board members have talked to Shortridge Principal Brandon Cosby about the partnership they'd like to see between the library and the school, and they said he's been supportive all along.

Another educational aspect will be informing people in Indiana about Vonnegut himself, his work, and similar works by other authors.

At German Fest, Whitehead said, a number of people said they were excited about the library, while other attendees, even those from



Farrell

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Indianapolis, didn't know who Vonnegut was, or at least didn't know much about him.

To help expose more people to Vonnegut's writing, Whitehead said there will be a monthly book club. Starting in January and meeting at the Rathskeller, Vonnegut books will be featured every other month, and other authors will be featured on the off months.

Kenan Farrell, a solo intellectual property attorney in Indianapolis who is helping spread the word about the library and monitors the group's Facebook page, said he looks at the library as a way to include things that Vonnegut would have liked.

"The board is amazingly diverse ... I feel we know people across a lot of different industries and we have a range of interests. ... Not to mention there is just so much that relates to Vonnegut, he was such a zany guy, so we'll try to do things he would have liked," he said.

Among the things Farrell said he'd like to see would be a partnership with Indianapolis Downtown Artists and Dealers Association's First Friday gallery walks and other art galleries that would be open to doing something that was related to Vonnegut either through his art or art inspired by him.



While many of the programs are in process, not to mention the search for a physical space and fundraising, the founders were optimistic about the library's future.

Board members said they were impressed with what Whitehead had accomplished in only a year since she first had the idea for the library – permission from the family, forming a board, contacting the Henry Miller Library in California which offered similar programs to fans of that author – and have been excited to see the amount of support they've received.

For instance, Farrell, who was recently in Portland, Ore., wore a t-shirt promoting the library. He was approached by a number of strangers asking for more information.

Jose

They are also eager to see how quickly the word has spread, and hope to reach many more fans of the author and his work, his art, his life, and his many other contributions.

As of Dec. 17, the organization learned the Internal Revenue Service granted their application for tax exempt status under 501(c)(3). One board member quipped there must be a Vonnegut fan in the office because it happened much quicker than they anticipated.

For more information about the organization or how to get involved, visit [www.vonnegutlibrary.org](http://www.vonnegutlibrary.org), or join the more than 2,200 fans of the library's Facebook page. •

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