

Pickens Friends of the Library Secures \$75,000 Matching Grant for Old Church-to-Library Transformation

Matching grant from the Mississippi Arts Commission to advance the second phase of renovations that transform historic Church into modern library.

PICKENS, MS, UNITED STATES,
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EINPresswire.com/ -- The [Friends of the Pickens Public Library](#) (FPPL)

announces a \$75,000 matching grant from the [Mississippi Arts Commission](#) (MAC) to advance the second phase of renovations, which will transform the historic Pickens Methodist Church into a modern library.

"We are so grateful to MAC for awarding this grant, which upon completion will allow us to relocate the library into the former church building for immediate use," said Saddle McDonald Stallworth, former librarian. "This is a beautiful story of community. In 2014, Joseph and Betty Guess, along with Lamar Sykes, generously donated the historic First United Methodist Church building to be repurposed as a library. Together, our vision laid the foundation for this project."

The grant requires \$50,000 in matching funds, and a capital campaign is underway. Phase 2 renovations will focus on improving ADA accessibility, updating the exterior to prevent water intrusion, making electrical upgrades, and completing associated finishes. Additional plans include renovating restrooms and adjacent classrooms and meeting rooms to provide space for arts programming and updated services. A new roof is a critical need as funds become available.

"Thanks to our legislators, \$200,000 was appropriated in 2019 to support this project," added Meredith Gowan Le Goff, president of FPPL. "Phase 1, completed in 2023 by [Belinda Stewart Architects](#), included structural floor upgrades to support book stacks, a new HVAC system, and



A photograph of the former First United Methodist Church, a historic landmark which was donated in 2014 by congregation on the condition that it would be converted into the future home of the Pickens Public Library.

an electrical panel. But there's so much more to do for this deserving project and community."

Holmes County, where Pickens is located, faces significant challenges, including a 29% adult illiteracy rate and a 47% poverty rate. One in five adults struggles to complete basic forms due to literacy issues. Research highlights the direct correlation between literacy, poverty reduction, economic growth, and individual empowerment.

Architect Belinda Stewart emphasized the project's broader impact: "This building will provide more than a valuable resource for learning, gathering, and inspiration, serving generations to come. We've seen projects such as these serve as catalysts for future economic development opportunities, by uniting communities and revitalizing historic assets."

Stewart's firm brings over 35 years of experience in historic renovations, including libraries and other community-focused projects.

"MAC is proud to support projects like this that enhance Mississippi's communities and artistic heritage," said David Lewis, executive director of MAC. "This grant demonstrates our state's commitment to fostering spaces that enrich the lives of Mississippians and nurture future generations of artists."

The MAC awarded \$3.5 million to 20 organizations in 13 counties for FY2025 through the Building Fund for the Arts (BFA) grant program. The grant funds essential repairs, renovations,



Saddie McDonald Stallworth, former librarian of the Pickens Public Library as seen from a video interview shot at the current Library in 2023. She currently serves as a member of the FPPL board of directors.



Architect Belinda Stewart from a video interview shot at the current Pickens Public Library in 2023, as she speaks on the need of this project and why it is vital to the community.

and expansions for facilities that host year-round arts programming. MAC received 41 applications totaling \$7 million in funding requests. Projects were evaluated based on artistic quality, project planning, organizational capacity, and community impact.

Grantees have two years to complete their projects, and MAC hopes to continue the BFA grant program as legislative funding allows.

The Pickens Library Capital Campaign is ongoing. Holmes County natives and literary notables Ralph Eubanks, nationally celebrated writer and essayist, and John Maxwell, acclaimed playwright and performer, to serve as honorary campaign chairs.

ABOUT FRIENDS OF THE PICKENS PUBLIC LIBRARY

The Friends of the Pickens Public Library (Friends of Mississippi Library Inc.) is a non-profit 501(c)(3) organization dedicated to actively creating and supporting programs to raise the profile of the Pickens Public Library. The FPPL and the Pickens Public Library are both very active in the community and strive for enriching the area through education, reading and other learning activities. FPPL is in partnership with and supported by the town of Pickens, Mississippi and the Mid-Mississippi Regional Library.

Those who wish to contribute to the matching funds for Phase 2 are welcome to do so either online at <https://gofund.me/25d7413c> or drop a check by mail at P.O. Box 188, Pickens, MS 39146.

ABOUT PICKENS AND THE PUBLIC LIBRARY

The town of Pickens, Mississippi, is located in the southeast corner of Holmes County and is situated on the Big Black River. It began as a ferry point over the river and as a trading post. Today, Pickens still serves as a commercial area for the larger rural community, with a Dollar



Architectural Rendering from Belinda Stewart Architects, PA showing how the inside of the new Pickens Public Library, once renovation and restoration on the old church are complete.



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General and the Pickens Post Office, which provides postal service to the surrounding rural area.

The Pickens Public Library, likewise, serves the greater surrounding rural area and the town of Pickens. Most importantly, the Pickens Public Library helps serve the children of the Goodman Pickens Elementary School, which has a 43% reading rate. It provides the only public access to computers and the internet, a meeting place for the citizens, and a point of distribution of information. The Pickens Public Library is a member of the Mid-Mississippi Regional Library System.

ABOUT THE MISSISSIPPI ARTS COMMISSION

The Mississippi Arts Commission was established in 1968 by the Mississippi Legislature as the official grants-making and service agency for the arts in the state. MAC provides financial and technical assistance for arts programming to arts organizations and educational institutions throughout Mississippi. Funded annually by the Mississippi Legislature, the National Endowment for the Arts and private funds, MAC uses this support to carry forth its mission and continues to act as a core and essential function of government. For more information about the BFA grant and other grant opportunities through MAC, visit arts.ms.gov/build.

ABOUT BELINDA STEWART ARCHITECTS

Belinda Stewart Architects, PA, of Eupora, Mississippi was founded in 1990 through the vision of one woman who firmly believed in the power of small towns to inspire, that family roots can build an ethic that weaves through a profession, and that architecture can see beauty in history and hope in the future.

For additional details about the firm, their team, and a project portfolio are available on their website at <https://belindastewartarchitects.com>.

Meredith Gowan Le Goff, President

Friends of the Pickens Public Library — Nonprofit 501(c)(3)

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