

Leveraging a Love of Libraries



Successful Fundraising for a New Building

SMITH COLLEGE.
Libraries

Introduction



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Smith College

- Private liberal arts women's college in Northampton, MA, f. 1871
- 2,500+ undergraduate students, 350+ graduate students & 53,000 living alums
- Ranked #13 among US colleges in 2026 by *US News & World Report*
- College Endowment: \$2.7 billion
- Fun Fact: In 1893, Smith was the site of the first women's basketball games





Smith College Libraries

- Three campus libraries:
 - Neilson Library
 - Hillyer Art Library
 - Josten Library for Performing Arts
-
- 55 FTE staff across all libraries
- \$4.9M general collections acquisitions budget
- Off-campus storage for 750,000 volumes



Special Collections

- Occupy 37% of Neilson Library
- Three major repositories:
 - >College Archives
 - >Mortimer Rare Book Collection
 - >Sophia Smith Collection of Women's History
- 17 FTE in Special Collections



Vision and Timeline

Design: Maya Lin Studio in partnership with Shepley-Bulfinch Architects

- Flexible, collaborative spaces for learning, research and teaching
- Commitment to a sustainable future
- Open up the central campus
- Natural light throughout the building
- Commitment to a sustainable future



Library Master Plan	Programming, Planning & Design	Construction	Opening
2010-2014	2015-2017	2017-2021	March 29, 2021



Program Planning as Education

Why?

- Prepare the community for change
- Define a narrative for Neilson's future
- Future of the library = future of Smith

Who?

- Senior staff & Board of Trustees
- Faculty
- Alumnae



Educating the Campus

- Engagement sessions and workshops: 128 faculty, 505 students, 120 staff, 956 survey respondents, 20 one-to-one interviews
- Curricular partnerships: Anthropology, Sociology, and Environmental Studies coursework about the project
- Chair Fair - campus community tested furniture: 500+ visitors - mostly students



Inform, Excite and Engage



- College publications ran feature articles, seeding institutional pride
- Guest speakers spoke about the future of academic libraries
- Librarians discussed program objectives at events and 1:1 donor meetings
- Friends of the Libraries newsletters provided monthly updates
- Communication stations staffed during reunions



Programming = Cohesive Messaging Across Platforms

- Libraries are changing and Smith must seize this opportunity
- Smith is a leader in developing the next-century library
- The renovation of Neilson was the college's largest capital project of the decade
- In remaking Neilson, Smith is broadening the concept of the traditional library, responding directly to trends in education and library design and development
- The renovation has been a community effort
- Philanthropic support for the library project has been strong



March 29, 2021
Opening Day!

The Oculus





Central Hall

1st Floor

NEILSON IN ACTION

Learning Commons





Central Service Point
Ground Floor



Sunken Garden Ground Floor



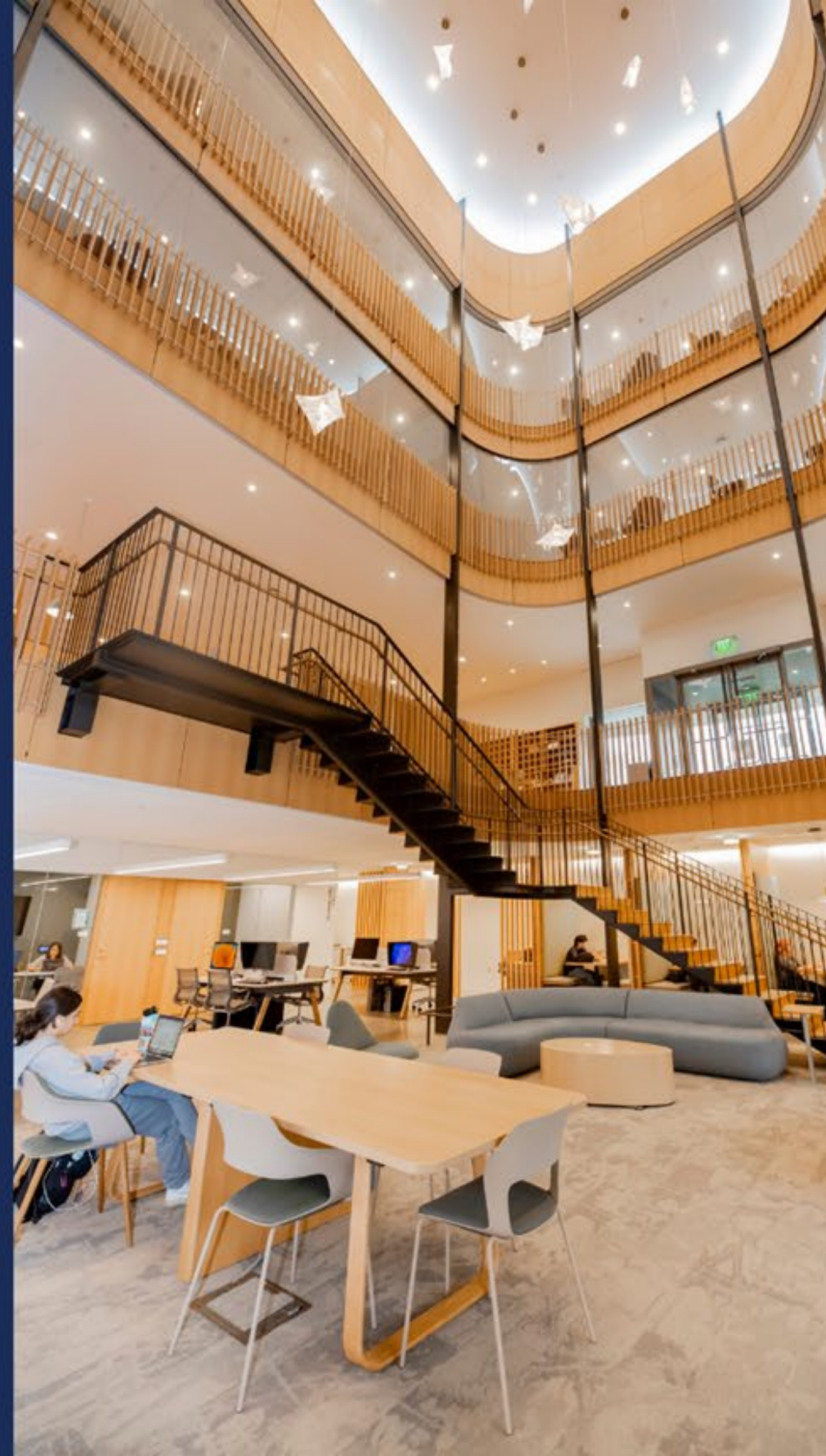
GF80 -
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GN451 -
GT75

Compact Shelving Ground Floor

NEILSON IN ACTION

Digital Media Hub



The image shows a modern, bright interior space, likely a cafe or library. The floor is made of light-colored wood with a herringbone pattern. In the foreground, there are several round tables with light blue tops and white chairs. In the background, there is a counter area with a wooden facade and a staircase. To the right, there are long wooden bookshelves. The ceiling is white with recessed lighting and several pendant lights hanging over the tables. A large compass rose is visible on the wall in the background.

The Compass Cafe

1st Floor



Reading Room

3rd Floor

NEILSON IN ACTION

Special Collections Classroom





Special Collections Reading Room

3rd Floor



Skyline Reading Room
4th Floor



Skyline Terrace
4th Floor



Amphitheater

Fundraising: Multi Faceted Strategy

- **Library Development Strategy Team**
 - Overall planning for fundraising
- **Central Development**
 - Presidential Library Roundtable gave special attention to lead donors
 - Individual rated donors - Equipped major gift officers for targeted discussions
 - Involve - reunion classes, regional Smith Clubs and the Friends of the Libraries
 - Educate & Engage - All-Constituent audiences through events, presentations
 - Created a library gift designation within the college's annual fund for smaller gifts



Fundraising: Alumnae Programming

- **Regional Events:** featured President McCarthy, Trustees, and sometimes Maya Lin.
- **Road Show:** Former Dean Susan Fliss and Director Beth Myers met with alum communities for small group talks, teas, lunches,
 - showcase library staff, discuss innovative library programming, and distinctive elements of Special Collections
 - **Goal:** to educate and fundraise for the building but also specific program components
- **Reunion Presentations and Q&A** - virtual and in-person.
- **Library Round Table** meetings were held twice a year.
- Included project updates in Smith's **alumnae magazine**



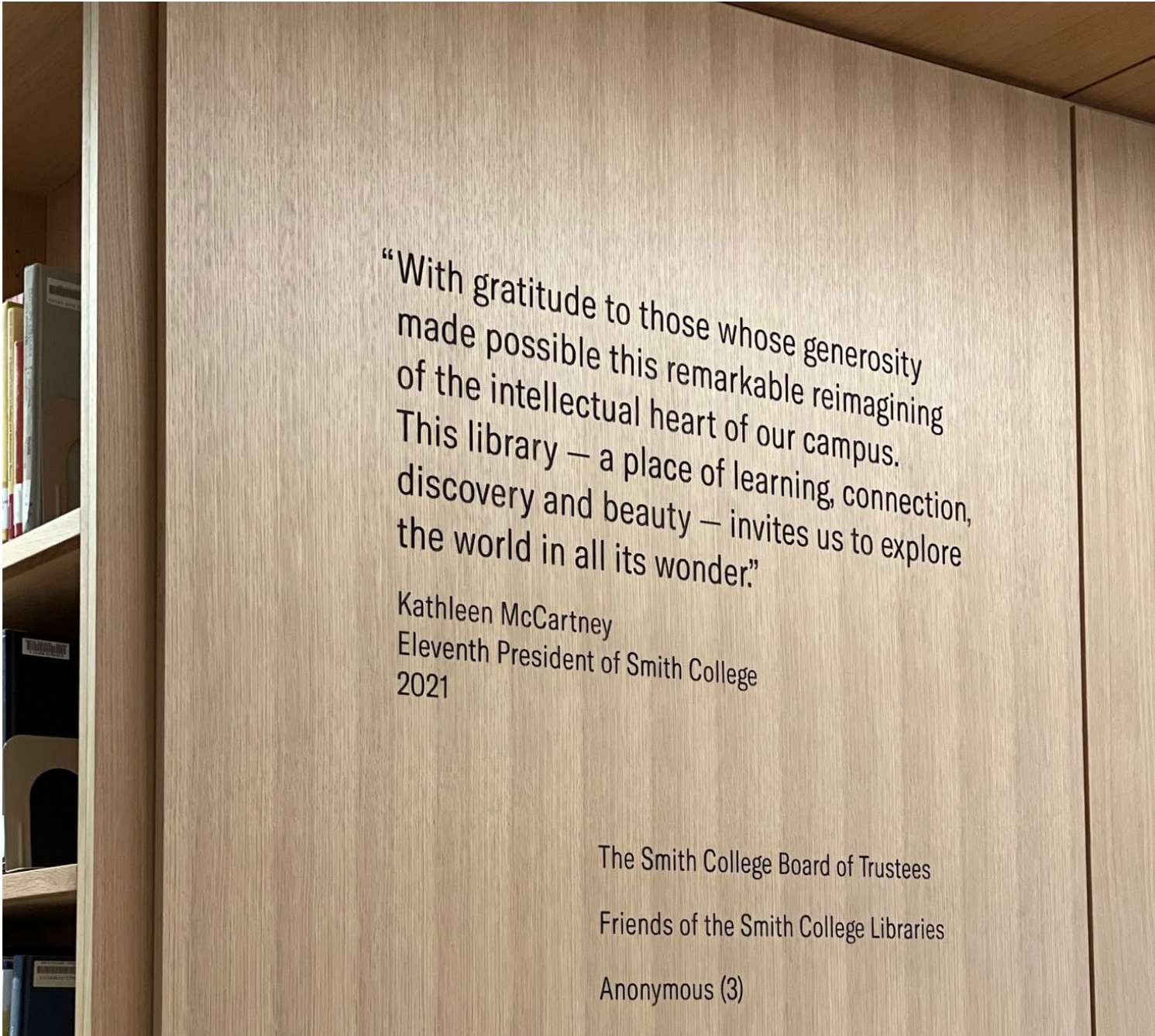
Fundraising: Naming Spaces

Opportunities to name spaces in the building for gifts ranging from \$250,000 to \$8,000,000



Fundraising: Donor Recognition

The community recognition wall lists names of all donors of \$100,000 + for construction & programming



Fundraising: Friends of the Libraries

- Lesser role, supporting the “Life of the Libraries” - non-competitive with larger goals
- Newsletter list grew to 3,000, communicating progress with donors
- Expected to lose members during the closure and reconstruction of the library
- Slow opening due to pandemic made it harder to recoup former Friends members
- Created the Oculus Society to “celebrate and support the New Neilson” and help with start-up costs



What Worked Well

- Library staff on the Planning Committee = direct impact on design
- Raised the profile of the library on campus with senior administrators, faculty, staff & students
- Raised awareness of the centrality of the library to the mission of the college
- Transformed the profile of Special Collections to be on par with the college's Art Museum and Botanic Garden (flagship collections) - leveraging Special Collections to deepen connection to the project
- Library is explicitly linked to the wellbeing of the college
- Building is now a campus focal point for classes, events, and exhibits

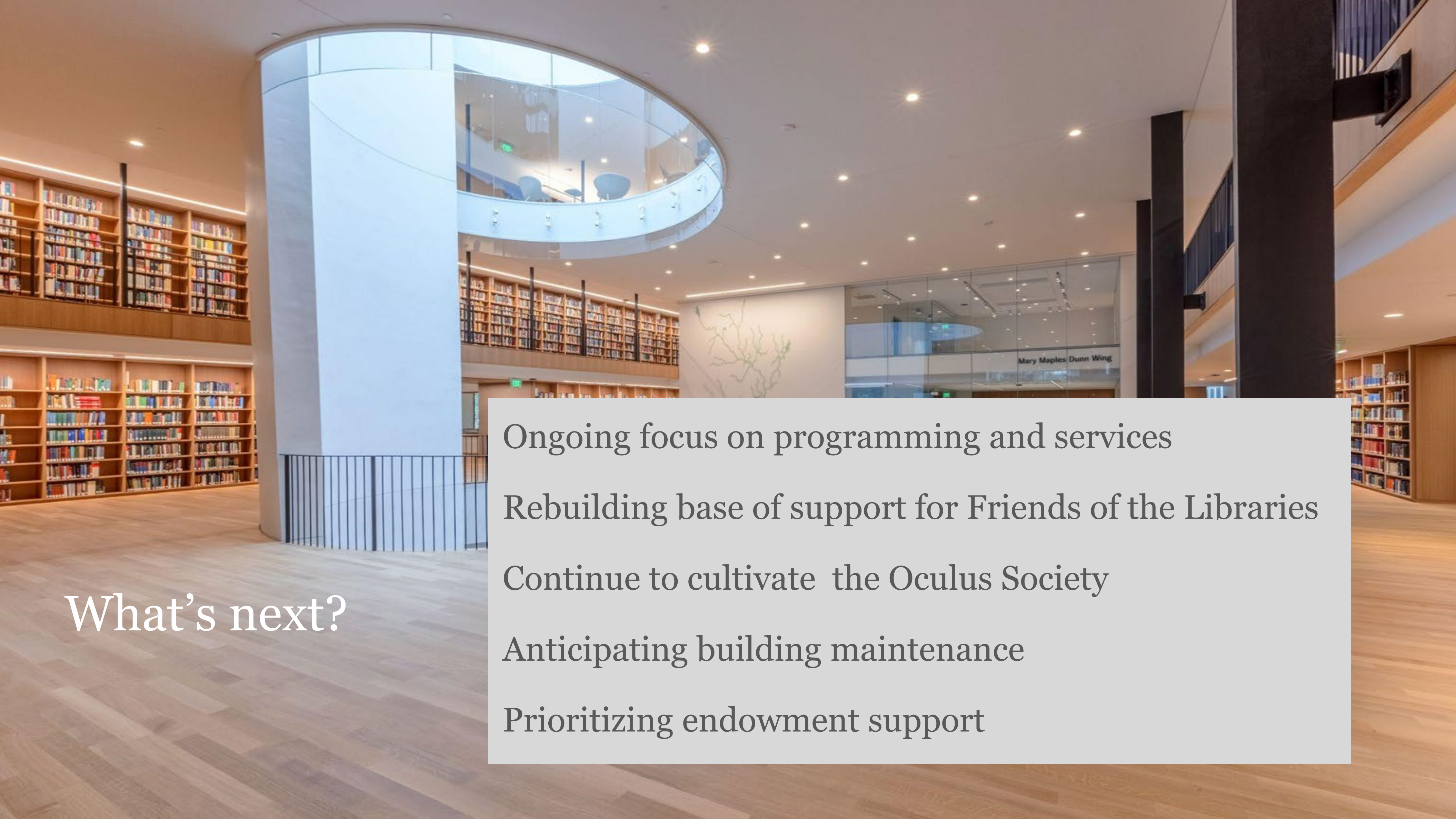


Expected & Unexpected Outcomes



- Seismic shift for the Smith community idea of a library
- Ongoing interest from alumnae, general public (many, many tours)
- High demand for space use by students, faculty and the community
- Focus on physical building diminished attention on program needs for staffing and technology
- During primary fundraising phase it was more difficult to raise funds for general library services
- The pandemic meant a quiet, controlled opening with no fanfare
- No appetite for post-construction retrofits





What's next?

Ongoing focus on programming and services

Rebuilding base of support for Friends of the Libraries

Continue to cultivate the Oculus Society

Anticipating building maintenance

Prioritizing endowment support

Thank you !



Visit libraries.smith.edu for more background on the Neilson Building Project

