



The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art: *Generations*

The early nineteen-thirties still hold starkly contrasting images: great advancements in the arts and sciences, as well as great economic instability around the world. The year 1933 also saw the first opening of a world-class museum of art in Kansas City, Missouri. The grandness of the building and the vision of its benefactors, William Rockhill Nelson and Mary Atkins, represent remarkable achievements for any age, but especially for its day.

After providing pleasure to almost seven decades of art audiences, The Nelson-Atkins Museum was due for an update. Devotees of the Museum agreed that more room was needed to display important works of art kept in storage for lack of gallery area.



The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art

Reference and research capabilities were falling short of a growing demand, programming outpaced space, and parking had become insufficient. Generosity had built this museum and now it was time for a new generation to reflect that sacrifice and reinvest in The Nelson-Atkins. "The building and its collections were generously given to the Kansas City community. Now, it was up to us to ensure the future of this great gift," offered Michael S. Churchman.

The capital campaign's original goal was \$125 million. As the realities of a major facility expansion, renovation and endowment developed, the goal was raised to \$175 million. The new goal allocated \$80 million toward expansion and renovation with the balance going to programming and endowment. The existing building included mostly European, Asian and American art. The addition of 145,000-square feet allowed for additional exhibits such as modern and contemporary art, African art and photography.

Renovations and additions also included a library with more than 125,000 volumes available for referencing, meeting rooms, classrooms, a bookstore, cafe and much-needed space for special exhibitions.

Hartsook's resident counsel for the *Generations* campaign was Eric Staley. "We were fortunate to involve Hartsook in this campaign and to receive Eric as our resident counsel. He has been with us full time for two-and-a-half years. Without him, we would not be where we are today. One of Eric's strongest contributions has been to guide us in the process of receiving major gifts. He is masterful in this," Churchman said.



Morton Sosland and Adele Hall, co-chairs of the "Generations" campaign.

The overall campaign plan was divided into five phases: Phase I (current and former trustees); Phase II (patrons prepared to give at the \$100,000 level and above); Phase III (membership, the Society of Fellows and the Business Council, foundations not included in Phases I and II); and Phase IV (membership, Friends of Art).

The great majority of campaign money came from Phase I, funded by current and former trustees.

Generations was uniquely advanced by committed and well-known Kansas City supporters.

This impressive achievement can be attributed to the dedication of *Generations* campaign leadership: co-chairs Adele Hall and Morton Sosland; steering committee members Donald J. Hall, Estelle Sosland, and Henry Bloch;

The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art



Steering Committee and Building Architect for "Generations" Campaign – The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art. Back row, from left: Henry W. Bloch, Michael Churchman, Marc Wilson, Eric Staley, Donald Hall. Front row, from left: Steven Holl [architect], Adele Hall, Karen Christiansen, Estelle Sosland, Morton Sosland.

and supported by another 100 or so volunteers who solicited the Fellows of Art and members of the corporate community.

"It is easy to understand how a campaign chaired by Adele Hall and Morton Sosland would have a high probability for success. But until one has an opportunity to work with these two extraordinary people, it is impossible to understand the true meaning of dedication. Adele and Morton had fire in the belly from day one to the close of the campaign, and they made the goals of the campaign come to life in the absence of architectural visualizations. Moreover, they motivated and set the standards for all the other volunteers down the line, whose accomplishments were equally amazing. Finally, the generosity of the trustees and former trustees was absolutely amazing. I cannot imagine ever experiencing such an

exhilarating and satisfying campaign again. The mechanics of the campaign were perfect and textbook in many ways, but the leadership, including that of my Museum colleague and friend, Michael Churchman, was in a word, inspired," said Staley.

The *Generations* campaign for The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art was the largest private dollar campaign in the history of Kansas City at the time, and one of the largest museum campaigns in the country. Extraordinarily, all but approximately \$6 million was raised locally, and deferred gifts amounted to less than 10% of the more than \$200 million raised.

Drawing on interviews with members of the Kansas City community, Museum volunteers, staff, and trustees, an

architectural planning firm was retained worked to identify and quantify the Museum's space needs. Once the planning was complete, a distinguished committee, chaired by Donald J. Hall, senior trustee of the Museum and chairman of Hallmark Cards, Inc., was formed to select an architect to design The Nelson-Atkins expansion and renovation.

The process included a sketchbook competition of six internationally recognized architectural firms. Steven Holl of Steven Holl Architects, New York City, was unanimously chosen. Holl's open, landscape-connected design will draw visitors into an experience of art and architecture before they ever enter the Museum. Expansion will increase The Nelson-Atkins by more than 55% in size, while immeasurably increasing its capacity to bring art appreciation and education to a new generation.

"We have benefitted from the contributions of previous generations to The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art. Their generosity and prudent stewardship have provided a legacy for one of the finest art museums in the world. We pledge

ourselves to continued excellence for future generations," board trustees and campaign committee members agreed.

While the majority of generosity for this campaign came directly from trustees and committee members, the Kansas City community was supportive of the effort. Corporate gifts also demonstrated a respect for The Nelson-Atkins' past and a strong belief in its future. In all, more than 4,000 donors made the campaign successful.

Said Staley, "The *Generations* campaign for The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art offers a case study in how a traditional campaign structure allows a major campaign to flex and succeed. This was a campaign of magnificent leadership enabled by a precise and well-planned vision."

William Rockhill Nelson and Mary Atkins provided a generous offering of art for the pleasure of others. *Generations* granted 21st century inheritors of The Nelson-Atkins' legacy an occasion to perpetuate the Museum's generous promise to future generations.

**The *Generations* campaign for
The Nelson-Atkins
Museum of Art
offers a case study in how
a traditional campaign structure
allows a major campaign to
flex and succeed. This was
a campaign of magnificent
leadership enabled by a precise
and well-planned vision.**