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Ellington library group seeks funds to renovate Book Cellar, which is plagued with moisture issues

By [Jamila Young](#), Staff Writer

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Peg Busse, president of the Friends of Hall Memorial Library, points to areas that will be part of the renovations to the basement called the Book Cellar at the library on Tuesday, Jan. 7, 2025, in Ellington. Jim Michaud/Hearst Connecticut Media

[ELLINGTON](#) — With a recurring moisture issue in a cellar that hasn't been renovated since the 1990s, the Friends of Hall Memorial Library are looking to renovate the space and are asking the public for donations.

Through the fundraising campaign, "Cellar to Stellar," the group hopes to raise enough money to purchase new metal shelving units, purchase plastic storage containers for book donations, update the cellar's signage and paint the walls and floors with waterproof paint.

Friends President Peg Busse said the group has been trying to keep the moisture under control using dehumidifiers for now, but by renovating the Book Cellar, the group can continue to efficiently store their donations and hold its book sales until a permanent solution to the problem is found.

"We probably get an average of 500 books a week that we sort through," Busse said, adding that since the Friends was formed in 1986, it has donated more than a half a million dollars to the library.



Moisture damage will be repaired in the renovations to the basement called the Book Cellar at Hall Memorial Library on Tuesday, Jan. 7, 2025, in Ellington.

Jim Michaud/Hearst Connecticut Media

Library Director Susan Phillips said the money raised by the Friends has been used to purchase the library's automated circulation and card catalog system and new furniture

for the library's young adult area. The Friends also help to purchase passes to local museums and helps to fund an all-ages summer reading program.

"That's an incredible amount of money," Phillips said. "Our community is very generous and our Friends are very hardworking."

But because the group wants to continue using the Book Cellar's profits to solely support the library, it decided to seek donations from the public to fund the renovations instead.

Busse said as of now, the Friends have raised about \$5,000, with a majority of the money coming from the family of Dan Sclare, a member of the Friends who died last year. Also known as "Magic Dan," Sclare was known for performing magic tricks for children.



The area slated for renovations in the basement called the Book Cellar at Hall Memorial Library on Tuesday, Jan. 7, 2025, in Ellington. The books here, donated by the public, are sold to benefit the library. Jim Michaud/Hearst Connecticut Media

"His family asked that donations in his memory be given to the Friends of the Library," she said. "We have spoken with his family, and he was a big advocate of children, so they agreed to let us use the money to work on the children's section of the Book Cellar and name it in his honor."

But the group still has a long way to go. Busse estimates the project will cost between \$25,000 and \$30,000, but if there is leftover money from the fundraising campaign, it will be put into the group's general fund.

Busse said the group is working with the town's Public Works Department on how to permanently fix the moisture issue.



A collection bucket on the front desk going to renovations in the basement called the book cellar at the Hall Memorial Library on Tuesday, January 7, 2025, in Ellington.
Jim Michaud/Hearst Connecticut Media

Phillip said the Book Cellar is an important part of not only the library, but the town itself.

"The Book Cellar is a very popular place and we consider it to be a valuable aspect of our service to the community," Phillips said. "We are pleased and excited for them that they are going to get a remodeled space."

Those wishing to help can send donations to the Friends at P.O. Box 280, Ellington, 06029, or drop them off in person in the donation jar at the library.

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REPORTER

Jamila Young is a reporter with the Journal Inquirer. She has been with Hearst Connecticut since June 2023. She is a 2014 Journalism graduate of SCSU. She has previously worked for The Bristol Observer and Step Saver newspapers. When not working, she enjoys going to concerts, comedy shows, watching TV, listening to music, and hanging out with friends.