History of Helmke Library

The history of the Walter E. Helmke Library is linked not only with the university but also with the community. Indiana University first offered classes in Fort Wayne in 1917. Purdue University, responding to manpower needs, established courses here during World War II. When Indiana University and Purdue University Fort Wayne moved to the site of the present campus in 1964, their separate libraries were merged into one collection that numbered 35,000 books and 600 periodical subscriptions. The staff consisted of two professional librarians, one full-time clerical assistant, and part-time student employees. IPFW’s first library occupied the west second floor wing of Kettler Hall.

In 1969, the Indiana legislature appropriated funds for a new library building. Through the efforts of the Indiana-Purdue Foundation, an additional $1 million was raised in the community. These funds were used to add the fourth floor to the present library and to purchase books for graduate programs. In September 1972, the entire campus as well as local citizens moved the 100,000-volume collection from the old facility to the new library in a well-orchestrated Book Walk. Student organizations competed to move the most books.

The library was named in 1977 for Walter E. Helmke, prominent Fort Wayne attorney and active member of the I.U. Board of Trustees and the Indiana-Purdue Foundation.

In 1982, through the combined efforts of the campus and area community, a fund drive succeeded in raising nearly $1 million to establish an endowment for the Helmke Library. The interest from these funds is used to supplement the collection budget. Another Campaign for Helmke Library raised $1.5 million in the community to provide additional funds for the collection and to establish computing facilities so essential to information retrieval in the 21st century.

In 1990, IUCAT Catalog, the Indiana University Libraries shared online catalog, was introduced at Helmke Library as part of a multi-million dollar statewide project. A new Web version of the catalog was implemented in 2001.

In 2006 the library began planning to convert the second floor to a campus Learning Commons envisioned as the most significant learning space outside the classroom. When the campus broke ground in 2009 for a new $42.4 million Student Services Complex it included plans to extend the Learning Commons with a 265 foot long glass-enclosed elevated walkway that would connect the Helmke Library second floor to the Walb Student Union and the Gates Sports Center. In November 2011, the Student Services Complex and the IPFW Learning Commons were opened for use. The Learning Commons includes librarian research consulting, the Writing Center, IT services computing, and areas for group and individual study.

The Helmke Library building closed to the public in December 2015 for a year-long renovation. During that period, library services remained intact. Staff at service points on the bridge and in a first-floor Library Services Center provided access to library collections, iPad and laptop loans, reserves, and in-person librarian consultations. Librarians and other library staff were housed in offices around campus.

The renovated library, which re-opened in January 2017, provides improved comfort, connectivity and safety with:
• A new heating and cooling system, upgraded plumbing and restrooms, new LED lighting throughout the building, new study spaces, including group study rooms, presentation practice rooms, a quiet study room, a new computer and teaching lab, and new furniture
• More power outlets, new network equipment, including wireless access points, new interactive media equipment
• A new stairway connecting the first and second floors and the new concierge desks
• Easy access to librarians and CASA services such as the Writing Center and tutoring, as well as Studio M, the Honors Center, and IT help in the Learning Commons
• A new fire alarm and sprinkler system
• High-quality finishes, from flooring to security systems, designed to enhance users’ safety and comfort

From the beginning, the library has been open to the public. In addition to serving the IPFW academic community, the library is often visited by high school students, by students from other colleges, and by professionals and others seeking information not available in local libraries. All Indiana residents are eligible for library cards.

**Building Facts**

Architect: Walter Scholer & Associates  
Groundbreaking: 1970  
Built: 1972  
Cost of Construction: $4,200,000  
Dedicated: 1977  
Named for: Walter E. Helmke, prominent Fort Wayne attorney and member of the Indiana University Board of Trustees and the Indiana-Purdue Foundation  
Total square feet: 113,000  
Seating capacity: 780

**Deans and Directors**

2017-    Alexis Smith Macklin  
2008-2016    Cheryl B. Truesdell  
1996-2008    Judith L. Violette  
1985-1996    Larry William Griffin  
1975-1984    B. Donald Grose  
1968-1974    Willard (Ted) Hunsberger