

> *Editorial*

## On a quest to be useful

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*By Editorial Staff, published in St. Paul Pioneer Press*

The James J. Hill Reference Library in downtown St. Paul is a distinct, beautiful and under-appreciated edifice. It is a private, non-profit library that abuts the much-appreciated main branch of the St. Paul Public Library.

The James J. Hill library “houses a world-class collection of resources and is considered the most comprehensive publicly accessible practical business library in America,” its promotional materials assert. Its mission “is to provide access to and assistance in finding the practical business information clients need to succeed.”

Its directors’ mission, at the moment, is to find ways to extend the library’s usefulness, its reach and the legacy of its namesake, the St. Paul railroad magnate.

As board chairman Greg Heinemann wrote on these pages yesterday, “We are considering proposals to share space, host events, inspire and support budding entrepreneurs and bring people to downtown St. Paul. We are even examining how we can invest a portion of the Library’s reserve funds with select partners to further its original purpose and benefit its users.”

Like other libraries, the Hill is adjusting to the digital age. It has money of its own, but it also needs a sustainable business model. Exactly what that might be is yet to be determined. This week, Heinemann announced a partnership with the College of St. Scholastica to provide research assistance to graduate

students. He and other board members are considering a variety of other ideas as well, and they’re interested in hearing more. (Send ideas to [info@jjhill.org](mailto:info@jjhill.org).)

There are several exciting aspects to their work. They represent a private entity in the middle of public space in the middle of downtown St. Paul, and they’re agitating in support of businesses and businesspeople. They’re determined to leverage Hill’s legacy. They start with a remarkable asset and a willingness to reimagine how it can be useful. As Heinemann wrote, “All ideas we consider must be consistent with our brand and our mission of fostering entrepreneurship and access to information and events that inspire achievement.”

Those are encouraging words at a time when Minnesota needs entrepreneurship more than ever. There’s not a magic button to push, and no one thing will make all the difference. We appreciate both the optimism and the humility Heinemann and his colleagues bring to their task as they look for ways to help ambitious people build on their ambitions.