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Best-selling author John Grisham and the Dave Matthews Band have chipped in a total of \$530,000 for a new building to house the Legal Aid Justice Center in Charlottesville.

The announcement came Wednesday at a wine-and-cheese gala celebrating the center's capital fund-raising campaign. The festivity was thrown in the shell of the old Brunton warehouse on Preston Avenue, where Legal Aid intends to move. Since the campaign began in 2000, it has raised nearly \$1.1 million of the \$1.85 million goal, Director Alex Gulotta said.

In announcing a \$280,000 gift, Grisham, who is best known for his legal thrillers, recounted the story of one of the first clients to walk through the door of his Mississippi law practice 20 years ago. Though this particular 30-year-old poor mother of five had legal problems enough for "50 lawyers," he said, she always wore her best clothes to court, did what he told her and after three years had saved enough to pay him \$100 for all his work.

"The next year she borrowed it back," Grisham said, to laughs from the 250-head crowd.

But she was his favorite client, he said, and he was her last hope.

"Legal Aid is the last hope for many people, for many people living in this community," he said, adding that he chose to publicize his donation to encourage others to give.

The Charlottesville-Albemarle chapter of Legal Aid expects to move into the \$1.85 million renovated warehouse in 2003. The center, which recently merged with Legal Aid offices in Richmond and Petersburg, gives free legal service to poor people in civil cases.

Its work focuses on securing workers' compensation, services for the mentally retarded and adequate living conditions and protection for children. One-third of the center's \$600,000 annual budget comes from the state, and about \$90,000 from the city, county and United Way-Thomas Jefferson Area combined.

The second-largest donation announced Wednesday was \$250,000 from Dave

Matthews, his band, band manager Coran Capshaw and the group's Bama Works fund.

In addition, the city donated \$110,000, the county \$55,000, the local legal community \$150,000 the Perry Foundation \$100,000 and the Charlottesville-Albemarle Community Foundation \$30,000. Unnamed individuals have given about \$100,000, Gulotta said.

Jane Matthews, a local writer and the sister of Dave Matthews, praised the lawyers and activists who keep the center going.

"It's an amazing group of people. They're so smart and could be making a lot of money somewhere else, but they choose to work here in the community," Matthews said. "It's such a worthy cause that makes such an impact on the community."

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