

Library financial history one of struggles

Measure 32-41 would create a funding district

By Kathleen Ellyn
Wallowa County Chieftain

Proponents of the Wallowa County Library District proposal on the May ballot will be making house calls in the coming weeks, going door-to-door to explain the benefits of the district to their neighbors.

This is not the first time that library proponents have door-knocked. Women in Joseph were the first, asking for book donations, when that library was established.

Nor is it the first time the idea of interconnecting Wallowa County libraries has been floated.

Kay Sawin, member of the Joseph City Library Board, recalls the time when there was no county library, and Caryl Coppin of Joseph, Jo Shell of Wallowa, Edith Clark of Lostine, Carol Wulff of Flora, Cleo Conrad of Imnaha, Rowena Adey of Enterprise and Callie Pifer of Troy formed a group to advocate for one.

They were concerned because there were so many residents in the county who had no library service; libraries served around 4,000 of the 7,000 people in the county.

The idea at the time was different from the current Library District proposal, which will absorb 65 cents per \$1,000 of assessed property value to preserve and expand services county-wide.

In the '60s, the idea was to



ELECTION 2018

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— Kay Sawin
Joseph City Library Board

have a “service library” that supported city libraries and established outlying library “stations.”

Although response in the various towns was sometimes negative, the vote from outlying areas carried the day on a ballot measure and a county “service library” was approved by vote in May 1964.

As a service library the county library wrote grants, sought donations of books, worked with the Northeast Oregon Library Association to secure group discounts on books, and expanded their services to Troy, Flora, Lostine

Shall District be authorized to impose \$0.65 per \$1,000 assessed value as a permanent rate beginning July 1, 2018?

If approved, this measure would form the Wallowa County Library District as an independent, public County library service district with a permanent rate dedicated to library services, programs, and materials, effective July 1, 2018. The district would have the powers granted to library districts and public libraries under state and

and Imnaha, Sawin recalled.

Because city residents also pay county general fund property tax, the library also served Joseph and Enterprise by providing service and support.

Once a month the county librarian would pack big bags of books and take new or previously uncirculated books to the outlying libraries on temporary loan. The libraries would take the county books that had been in their libraries the longest and pack them up for the county library to recirculate to other libraries.

Over the next 15-20 years the county library grew to have two full-time employees and dozens of services.

Children’s services were often a focus. By the '80s, libraries had reel-to-reel projectors,

MEASURE 32-41

Permanent Tax Rate for Library District

local laws. An elected five-member, at-large, District Board would serve as the governing board of the district to provide oversight and accountability. The permanent and dedicated funding source for library services would be up to \$0.65 per \$1,000 assessed value. The Library District will include all of Wallowa County except the city of Lostine.

Formation of a Library District would do the following:

- Increase library service hour;
- Retain books, summer reading, student and jobseekers support services, and outreach to children and senior citizens;
- Provide a permanent and dedicated funding source for library services; up to \$0.65 per \$1,000 assessed value

In the first year of imposition, the proposed rate would raise approximately \$490,313.

and Laurel and Hardy movies were played to mobs of children covering the entire floor of the libraries, Sawin recalled.

The traditional view of the librarian behind the desk checking out books was never the model for Wallowa County, she said.

“The exciting thing about libraries is that they don’t stay the same,” Sawin said. “They have to change to meet needs.”

The first real financial crisis for the county library came in 1987. Although a levy was rejected, commissioners found a way to preserve the county library by cutting staff to a single librarian on half-time hours until funds became available again.

The biggest change in how the library operated, however,

came with the arrival of the Internet, which required librarians across the county to dramatically expand their already multi-skill repertoire, Sawin said.

Soon all of the libraries were interconnected across the state through the SageCat system, and patrons could order any book available in the state.

That swelling of media and services made the grant-writing services of the county library even more important and created the county library that has existed until now.

Giving people those extra services is necessary, Sawin said, but providing old-fashioned reading material is critical.

“Reading makes such a difference to a child’s future,”

Sawin said. “Reading to a child also makes a difference. One of the dangers of limited reading is a narrowing of ideas. You really need the broad exposure that a library can provide; the ability to hear the other side of the story.”

The narrowing of exposure to ideas can lead to an inability to understand the nuances and contexts of events, Sawin said.

Information gathered from the Internet often does not provide the broad exposure that books provide; much of the information presented online is a single-focus snippet, she noted. This is why all freshmen in college are required to take a course in critical thinking and identifying valid information online. It is also one of the reasons why college students are given booklists and required to find “original sources” rather than depend upon online research.

“A library provides that breadth (of information) that no family can afford to provide for their child,” Sawin said. “You become so vulnerable when you do not have this education.”

In 2017 County Commissioners announced that there were no funds to continue the county library. And, again, a group of citizens came forward to place a financing solution on the ballot.

Sawin hopes that residents will vote “yes” for libraries again, as they did in 1964.

“A no vote on our current library district bid means we are choosing which people are allowed to have access,” she said.

Hobbs, Hunter, Slinker read for final Fishtrap Fireside of the season



Hobbs Hunter



Slinker

The final Fishtrap Fireside of the season will be 7 p.m. April 6 at Fishtrap, 400 E. Grant St., Enterprise.

The fifth season of Fishtrap Fireside wraps up with a generational mashup of featured readers including humorist and children’s author Kathy Hunter, poet Nathan Slinker and recent high school graduate Sebastian Hobbs. Sessions are free, and light refreshments are served. An open mic follows where the audience can come to the

podium and take a turn.

An award-winning journalist, Hunter spent 23 years in Alaska writing for newspapers and magazines, editing Alaska Today magazine, teaching and writing life stories. She has two self-published books and four CDs.

Hobbs has been writing poetry and short essays for the past decade. He grew up on his family’s farm in Lostine where he spends his time nose-deep in books, tinkering with cam-

eras and computers and exploring new ideas for his writing. Hobbs has been participating in Fishtrap workshops and classes since 2008 when he first attended Summer Fishtrap.

Slinker has participated in many Fishtrap workshops and events, and in 2013 was selected as a Summer Fishtrap Fellow. In 2014 he received a master of fine arts

degree from Arizona State University, where he taught poetry and English composition courses. His poetry has been published in many national journals.

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The 6th generation is supporting me! I hope you will!

I’ve worked for the Wallowa County Commissioners, served as the Planning Director, led Wallowa Resources, managed my own cattle herd, been recruited as the founding Vice President of the U.S. Endowment for Forestry and Communities, and Chief Program Officer for the Sonoran Institute.

I’ve served on the Wallowa County Natural Resources Advisory Committee, Economic Development Council, Workforce Board, Joseph School District Budget Committee, Rotary Club Board of Directors, as well as the Oregon State Board of Forestry, Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board, and the Communities Committee of the 7th American Forest Congress.

I’ve been recognized as Wallowa County’s Civic Leader of the Year, one of Oregon Business Magazine’s 50 Leaders for Oregon, the High Desert Museum Community Leadership Award, and been a National Finalist in the Ford Foundation’s Leadership for a Changing World.

I’ve given back to our community....volunteering, supporting and contributing to most of the efforts that make this community even better!

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Diane DAGGETT
County Commissioner

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