

Regional Library Effort Has Friends All Over

■ Twenty percent of the \$7 million project is already contributed.

By Ron Karten

Willamina Lumber Company pledged \$500,000. Bob Harris of D Industries provided 20 acres of land valued at \$340,000. The City of Sheridan contributed \$210,000 worth of architectural designs and other services. And the Friends of the Sheridan Library, with individual contributions, has raised nearly \$30,000 for the project.

In all, community businesses, government entities and individuals have provided more than \$1.2 million for a nearly \$7 million regional library and community center to be located on State Road 18-B that runs between Sheridan and Willamina parallel to State Road 18.

As envisioned, the project will fund two buildings with room for a third, according to Portland Architect Fred C. Gast, Jr. who also did the designs for a previous effort which would have built a new library for Sheridan alone.

The first building will be the library, but according to Gast, "it will not be your normal library facility. It will contain an exhibition hall and a display gallery as well as public meeting space" in addition to library facilities.

The second building will be a community center with stadium seating for 320 with room for another 50 chairs on the floor. "It will house space for all kinds of community activities," said Gast, "including a full range of performance venues from high school graduations to musical events, movies, lectures, and sit down dining for 300.

It also will provide a facility for a full kitchen for community breakfasts and a full range of food services, plus a larger reception gallery for exhibits.

A future building on the same site may also house recreational activities, like a swimming pool.

Boosters point to specific favorite features. "It would have wireless connections so people could walk in with laptops," said Angie Barry, Chair of the project board and a Sheridan City Council Member. "At Sheridan, only three people can get on (line) at a time. A lot of parents in this area don't have the money to buy a computer and get on the Internet."

"We're pushing the educational aspect for the general population," said Sheridan Interim City Manager Lonnie Hinchcliff. He pointed to "a computer room, separate rooms for smaller children and for older adults." And he foresees the archive room holding artifacts from both the Tribe and the local communities.

In short, said Gast, "It will provide a better library for the area than any of the individual cities can provide alone."

This first grand scale cooperative effort among Sheridan, Willamina and Grand Ronde opens the doors to a range of regional proposals, including water projects and other community enhancements.

"The little library in Sheridan is a fabulous little library but it is just

too small," said Michelle Bleth, a Sheridan School Board member who also is a Board Member of the West Valley Library District & Community Center Development Committee. "This is one of those opportunities that allow us to avoid be-

follow."

In addition, said Hussey, the Tribe is in line in October this year for an annual federal grant worth some \$40,000 in mass transit funding, and the project would like to make use of some of that money for

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~Angie Barry, Project Chair

ing one of those communities that doesn't have enough money to do anything."

Dreams for the project include a number of related but separate projects. One will tie the area to transportation projects stretching from Portland and Salem to McMinnville and the coast. A bike and pedestrian path funded by the Oregon Department of Transportation will add to the transportation possibilities, and provide a safe place to exercise for residents of both Sheridan and Willamina.

"Everyone has to understand," said Hinchcliff, "that this is a big picture. We're working with three to four ideas and one can move forward without the others."

The Ford Foundation has yet to weigh in, though they have done a site visit and the announcement of a grant, possibly as high as a half

its ambitious transportation plans.

"They're working on connecting mass transit from Portland, Keizer and McMinnville and Salem through to Lincoln City. With different companies operating mass transit in each area, Hussey has helped with the negotiations that will be necessary to link all the lines.

Hussey and Tribal Engineer Eric Scott are aware that the purpose of the Tribal grant is to make it easier for Tribal members to get around for jobs and Tribal activities. While the Library project transportation plan may provide the best solution, Hussey said that he and Scott are currently "collecting information to decide what our direction should be for the Tribe."

The project has the support of a range of local movers and shakers. "It's one of the most important

the community," said Siegel, "but professionals come because they want a (better) quality of life. This is one more example of a way to improve the quality of life here."

For Gary Baune (pronounced 'bonnie'), another project Board Member, and also an Engineering Technician at the Federal prison in Sheridan, the project offers the prison another way to maintain friendly relations with the local community.

"The library committee is going to request, in writing, labor from the prison," he said, for jobs like "cleanup, landscaping, possibly some trade-type labor, if it's allowed."

Because inmates have been using Sheridan Library services for years, Baune said, "this is more like payback. There's a huge burden that the inmates put on the local library system."

The project has a lot to offer in simple economic terms, too.

"Both buildings (Sheridan and Willamina libraries) are old," said Angie Barry, "so both Sheridan and Willamina are looking at putting money into the buildings, and I know that Sheridan can't afford what we are looking at. We just did major repairs to the heating and air conditioning units - it was work we couldn't wait any longer to do."

Those recent repairs cost the city \$6,300 and except for the current library budgets serving Willamina and Sheridan, the cost of the new project will be entirely donated.

Plans for the new library project call for the \$6.8 million price tag to be contributed, and in addition, the cities' current library budgets will shift over to finance transportation for the new project. Specifically, the two cities' library budgets plus rider fares will pay for a shuttle bus, a bus driver and insurance on an annual basis, according to Willamina Mayor Rita Baller, also a project Board Member.

As envisioned, the shuttle will travel between Sheridan, Willamina and possibly Grand Ronde with the library facility serving as the hub.

Barry also insists the project is a great way to bring a good feeling in the community. "There used to be jobs and money here. Today, they have jobs that don't pay as well. They're discouraged. This is a great way to have communities work together and feel better."

The effort has been underway for years, stretching back to the City of Sheridan's effort in 2002 to seek public funding for a new library.

Many in the local communities don't yet know much about the project, said Hinchcliff. Public informational meetings are still ahead with the next one scheduled for the evening of September 21 at Willamina City Hall.



Photo by Peta Tinda

If You Build It... — The site of the proposed regional library was pledged to the project by Bob Harris of D Industries. Valued at \$340,000, the 20-acre site is among a number of large gifts offered to bring the project to life.

million dollars, is in the offing. Contact with the Tribe's Community Fund also is in the near future, though Tribal reps already have been playing a strong advisory role.

Duane Hussey, Development/Construction Coordinator for the Tribe's Housing Division, and Brent Merrill, Public Information Officer for the Tribe, have joined the board as advisors in their areas of expertise.

Although the Tribe's Community Fund has not yet been approached by the group for financial help, it likely will be once the Ford Foundation grant comes through.

"If the Ford Foundation comes in," said Hinchcliff, "then others will

things, along with the schools, that we can offer," said Tonya Mishler, Sheridan City Councilwoman, and project Board Member. "If you have children, the first thing you ask is, what are the schools like? And then, what kind of library do you have? To me, it's one of the best things a city can offer its citizens."

For Mark Siegel, Assistant Headmaster at the Delphian School, a K-12 day and boarding school in Sheridan, the library project is part of an effort to "see the communities flourish. We're part of these communities," he said.

Small communities sometimes have difficulties attracting professional people. "Professionals add to