

The Library continued to grow along with the town. In 1952, a Board of Directors was formed to manage the valuable services provided to the community by the Florence Public Library. The Board held its first meeting in January of 1952, with Molly Andreasen serving as President. Alice Hanson was hired as librarian. Years later, at her retirement, Mrs. Hanson recalled that “she didn’t know beans” about running a library, but board president Andreasen told her: “we learn together.” And they did, with the help of a representative of the State Library who visited Florence and instructed the librarian and the library board “how to catalogue and index the books according to the standard procedure.”

In February of 1955, the Florence Public Library became an official department of the City when the Florence City Council formally legalized its status.

“After 40 years, Florence city council has gotten around to legalizing the Florence Public Library. The prophetic words of the late editor W.H. Weatherson in “The West” back in 1915 that the library would be accepted by the city when the council got around to it have been fulfilled!”

~ *The Oar, February 11, 1955*

Ten years later, the Florence Public Library celebrated its 50th anniversary and a lengthy history was published in *The Siuslaw News*.

“Present librarian on duty Mrs. Alice N. Hanson, stated that the library now has 6616 volume books on its shelves, with approximately 607 persons actively using library cards. The Florence Public Library is open Tuesday, Wednesday, Friday, and Saturday from 1 to 5 p.m. Its value to the people is limited only by the use they make of it. Its purpose is, and always has been, to serve.”

~ *The Siuslaw News, June 3, 1965*

And the following year, on July 29, 1966, Florence voters approved a \$150,000 bond issue for the construction of a new combination city hall and library. Long-time Florence resident Mary Johnston was serving on the Library Board, and was pivotal in championing the library move. The new facility was located on Highway 101 just north of the Siuslaw River Bridge. Librarians instrumental during this time of transition included Larry Cross (the first professional librarian ever to work at the Florence Library), Beverly Stafford, and Wyma Hood (Library Director, 1972-1978).

A “Friends of the Library” group was organized in 1977 to help support the library by raising funds, sponsoring cultural events, gathering community support, and encouraging private donations. Just five years later, the local newspaper reported:

“The Friends’ five year affair with the library has been a successful one and if the couple stays together it’s likely to be busy at the Florence Public Library for the next few years.”

~ *The Siuslaw News, June 17, 1982*

The 1980s would see not only the continued success of the Friends of the Library but the expansion of Library services to residents outside of Florence. In June of 1984, the voters of Florence approved a proposal initiated by Library Director Michael Gaston and a citizens’ panel for the creation of the Siuslaw Public Library District to encompass not only the town of Florence but also the area from Dunes City on the south to Heceta Beach on the north and from the coast east to Cushman. With the approval of funding for the library district in a September 1984 referendum, the newly-formed library district officially started business on July 1, 1985.

“Florence and the surrounding communities have outgrown their current library. The need for more space will become ever more acute as the area grows. Remaining in the current location is not an option. Voters should support the library bond issue and begin planning to celebrate its opening...”

~ *Editorial in The Siuslaw News, undated*

Demand for library services continued to grow, and in December of 1990, after the successful \$1.5 million bond issue passed with a 70% majority, a sparkling new 15,000 square-foot facility was completed and opened to the public at the same location where the Florence library stands today. The land for the Library was purchased with funds left to the Library by Elsie Johnson. Ms. Johnson, a frequent library patron, had been the head librarian of the Florence Library in the 1920’s.

The Siuslaw Public Library District boundaries were expanded in 1993 to include the areas surrounding the Lane County communities of Mapleton, Swisshome, and Deadwood. This expansion doubled the area of Lane County served by the library district. In May of 1996, the Mapleton branch library facility relocated from a 500-square-foot storefront on Highway 126 to its current location on Riverview Drive, two remodeled rooms in the historic Mapleton school building owned by the Lion’s Club.

Full shelves, not enough work and storage space, and limited parking led to a decision to further expand the Florence library facility in the early 2000’s. A successful campaign to solicit donations was undertaken, although a ballot measure failed by 132 out of 7,680 votes cast. After the measure was defeated by this narrow vote, the District Board commenced a new fundraising effort and additional donations, Urban Renewal funds, and funds raised by an estate bequeathed to the library by Linda Buck resulted in a successful campaign. The much-needed library addition was completed in 2010 under Library Director Steve Skidmore, and the first piece of permanent public art in the form of Mack Holman’s statue “Joy” was installed on site and dedicated in March 2013.

The history of library service in western Lane County is one of progress and growth. In the last hundred years the collection has grown from 100 items to over 101,000. With this voluminous collection and the addition of computers, access to information is unlimited and available to all. Not only is the Siuslaw Public Library a place to gather information, it is a place to seek new worlds via books and movies, and a place where people can gather to meet friends, old and new. The citizens served by the Siuslaw Public Library District can be grateful to the tireless dedication of the countless number of library staff, board members, Friends, and volunteers who have contributed over the last one hundred year to the success of one of the best public libraries in Oregon.

Also in 2013 Meg Spencer, formerly of the Orem Public Library in Utah, was selected as the new Library Director upon Steve Skidmore’s retirement. She began work at the Siuslaw Public Library in November 2013, joining Asst. Director Gayle Waiss; Librarians Kevin Mittge, Mary Colgan-Bennetts, Linda Weight; and Jeanne Smalldon ; Library Assts. Margaret Avery, Lynda Green, Yvonne Pappagallo, and Susie Voth; Clerks Stephanie McNutt and Trudy Kelley; and substitutes Bill Benson, Barb Grano, Beth Hammond, and Lauren Hesse. A team boasting more than 150 years of library experience!

Truly, the history of library service in Lane County is a story of progress and growth and one of the best libraries in Oregon.



Happy Builder at the Library Lego Club

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for all your service to the community

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