
Volume 13
Number 3
*Rural Libraries: The Strength of Community (Fall
2007)*

July 2014

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Estacada News

Recommended Citation

Adams, B. (2014). Estacada's New Library: The Heart of the Community. *OLA Quarterly*, 13(3), 20-21+. <http://dx.doi.org/10.7710/1093-7374.1172>

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OLA Quarterly is an official publication of the Oregon Library Association | ISSN 1093-7374

Estacada's New Library:

The Heart of the Community

by **Barbara Adams**
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What does it take to build a new library in a small, rural town?

In Estacada, involving the community was key. It took years of talking while numerous committees formed to take on specific tasks. It took expanding the Estacada Public Library's service district, the financial support of individual donors, grant awards, and the passing of a \$1.9 million bond. But most of all, it took visionaries who recognized that a library, especially in a small town, represents hope for the future.

For nearly 50 years, library patrons visited the cozy, 2,800 square-foot Estacada Library, housed in the 1930s-era City Hall building which is quaint and beautiful, but also dark and too small to hold the thousands of books tucked away in storage.

The library space offered the community eight computer stations, narrow aisles, and a teen section in a closet. The children's area was a small cubby-sized corner, with room for one or two children to play. One restroom with one stall served everyone who visited.

Over the years, the need for more space grew, while the existing space remained unchanged. Serious discussion about building a new library began in 2002. By early 2004, the wheels were in motion to create a special taxing district that would encompass the existing Estacada School District

boundaries. Decisions were also being made to pursue a \$1.9 million bond in the upcoming November election.

Organizers put the cost of building a new, 13,000 square foot library at \$3.5 million. An anonymous donor offered to help purchase a possible building site: a .77-acre piece of property alongside Wade Creek Pond for \$180,000. Volunteers of America donated the pond to the city, and the property around it would later be designated as a future city park.

Members of the community contributed what they could, in unique and innovative ways. Area resident and artist Nancy Cundill donated thousands of her handcrafted pieces of jewelry to sell as a fundraiser for building the new library. People attended town hall meetings to give their input on what they wanted the library to look like—large pond-facing windows, wooden trusses and crossbeams, and a fireplace were among the most desired elements.

The bond passed with a majority 54 percent in favor November 2004. That, combined with grants and donations, put the library's financing at 72 percent of the goal. By February 2005, that number had climbed to 77 percent, with local donations reaching \$641,239.

A citizen's advisory committee was formed to oversee the construction of the new library, and a teen advisory board was formed to visualize and plan the new teen section. All the while, the Estacada Library Foundation, formed in 1998, continued its work on fundraising and keeping the project in the public eye.

On September 12, 2005, Clackamas County Commission Chair Martha Schrader and Estacada Mayor Bob Austin joined the community in a ground breaking celebration. Approximately \$3 million in funds had been secured for the project at that point.

One of the elements included in the design of the building was a 1,020 square



The library truly is the heart of the community, and the outpouring of time, money and volunteering that was required to build this building shows the level of dedication Estacada area residents have committed to their future.

—KATINKA BRYK
ESTACADA LIBRARY DIRECTOR



foot community room. Due to lack of funds, it had been taken out of the plan. But, in December 2005, an anonymous donor contributed \$150,000 toward the construction of the \$215,000 room.

The building took shape throughout the winter and spring of 2006, as the foundation was poured and the walls erected. By summer library staff and volunteers began the task of moving. Once again, the community was involved. Patrons were asked to check out 50 items from the old library, and return them after the new library officially opened to the public August 6, 2006.

Hundreds of community members attended a party sponsored by the Meyer Memorial Trust, celebrating the opening of the new Estacada Public Library on August 5, 2006.

The first surprise was the roomy slate-floored foyer with 10 two-foot square mosaics, depicting Oregon wildflowers and created by local artist Mimi Near. This beautiful artwork made the foyer floor uniquely Estacada, and achieved part of the One Percent for Art ordinance spearheaded by the Estacada Area Arts Commission. To the left of the foyer, a long hallway leads to the Flora Community Room, and two spacious restrooms. Inside the library high wooden-trussed ceilings bathe in light from huge windows facing Wade Creek Pond. In the middle of the room, comfy chairs surround a majestic two-sided stone fireplace. Art donated by local artists such as Brent Lawrence hang from walls, and 90 Douglas fir bookshelf ends made by an all-volunteer crew with locally donated materials, spread out to the right and left.

At the opening, guests enjoyed live music and dancing outside on the labyrinth patio that was lined with bookshelf-shaped benches surrounded by native shrubs and trees donated by local nurseries. Fine food and wine were served in the Flora Community Room. Public officials and children explored the space. But most of all, there was pride, because the Estacada Library



Catherine Kumlin served on the Percent for Art Committee, and Bruce Whiting is the President of the Estacada Library Board.



New books, magazines and fireplace seating at the Estacada Public Library.

didn't just happen—it was a happening.

The party celebrating the new library was only the beginning. Within six months after opening 823 people applied for new library cards, 259,411 items were checked out—38,371 more than the year before—and 9,000 items that had been stored in insulated storage units had been added to the shelves. Use of the 23 new public computers rose to 78 percent.

“The library truly is the heart of the community, and the outpouring of time,

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Little Steps

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Friends turned out in support. Although the successful \$1,690 award seems pretty small, it insured the continuation of the one ever-surviving Cornelius Library program: children's English and Spanish language storytimes.

A volunteer appreciation event continued to set a positive tone for library supporters and remind them of their value to the library even though the toughest times seemed to have passed. The local Boosters Club awarded us funding as did several other individuals and corporations, securing programming for a year or more. The local community center, Centro Cultural, re-established ties with the library to cosponsor two very well attended library events.

Another success was an invitation to submit a full grant application for a highly competitive LSTA grant for a Latino outreach project. Finally, our 2007–08 budget was over \$215,000. This additional funding

allowed us to fully restore hours and gave us a much needed infusion to the collections. All of this occurred in less than nine months!

Locals who know our library still express concern when I introduce myself. “Sure we’re under-funded and struggling to meet OLA threshold standards,” I say, “but the support I have received from generous staff, Friends and volunteers, the administrators with high expectations, and the grateful patrons make every challenge an opportunity for reward.”

Every day in this rural library we remember how we were almost shut down and know, like many Oregon libraries, that our existence is not a given. Every challenge must be taken seriously and worked on diligently, and every success must be shared and celebrated. Working together, the library and the community of Cornelius are addressing these challenges. 🌿

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Estacada Public Library at dusk viewed from the future Wade Creek City Park.

money and volunteering that was required to build this building shows the level of dedication Estacada area residents have committed to their future,” said current Estacada Library Director Katinka Bryk, who worked alongside Director Beth McKinnon during the project. McKinnon recently retired from her job as director. “Library Director Beth McKinnon spent over 1,000 volunteer hours ensuring this project’s success—and its beauty and functionality is a testament to what a great job she did.” 🌿

For a list of major donors to the project, please go to www.estacadalibraryfoundation.org.

Photos courtesy of Charles Ingram.

