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Now that we have a district, what do we do?

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The people in Lincoln County will tell you that you will be disappointed if you expect the formation of a Library District to be a quick and easy task. According to their experience, you must be willing to work on the formation slowly and surely for many years.

THE EARLY YEARS

The library directors and city managers in the seven cities of Lincoln County had recognized for many

years that they needed to find a way to provide library service to the people living outside their city limits. They could not continue to provide free service (with no tax support), and fee-based service caused even more problems. Once a year they would go, en masse, before the county commissioners to request funding and would meet with limited success. The county commissioners gave \$750 to four libraries (Siletz, Waldport, Yachats, and Toledo). The Newport and Lincoln City libraries, which may

have also been getting similar funding, started charging a nonresident fee of \$12.

It appears the county commissioners finally tired of this yearly ritual and set up a Lincoln County Public Library Board in July 1976, consisting of eight citizen members from different areas of the county. The board was charged with establishing "a method of taxation to support public libraries in providing better library service to all the people of Lincoln County." The county commissioners then authorized funding for a library consultant, Phyllis I. Dalton, to help with this process.

On February 15, 1978, Dalton presented her study, *Countywide Cooperative Library Service, Lincoln County, Oregon: An Action Plan*. The plan called for a countywide serial levy to be paid by both city and county residents to provide funding for library services on a nonfee basis. The county commissioners accepted the plan for the levy; however, it never passed.

The plan read as follows:

So that people living in jurisdictions supporting public libraries will not pay twice for public libraries, the amount paid by the people living in cities with public libraries into the serial library levy will be returned to the cities. The remaining funds will be distributed to the incorporated cities with public libraries according to population and according to per capita support. This fund will be an equalization grant. It will be based on the percentage the popu-

lation of an individual city with a public library is to the total population of all cities with public libraries in Lincoln County. This percentage will be applied to one-half of the remaining funds. The Grant will also be based on the percentage the per capita city support of a public library in an individual city is to the total per capita city support of all cities with public libraries in Lincoln County. This percentage will be applied to the other half of the remaining funds. The total of these two amounts becomes the Equalization Grant. The Library Levy Refund to the cities prevents the double payment of taxes for library service and the Equalization Grant allows for extended use of the public libraries countywide.

Needless to say, this proposal was difficult to explain to the public, who generally felt that this levy really was double taxation.

So the librarians continued their yearly pilgrimage to the county commissioners. The citizen boards and librarian task forces continued to try to find a way to fund countywide library service. By 1982 Newport, Lincoln City, and Toledo were charging a \$15 non-resident fee. The fee grew to \$45-\$50 by 1990.

On October 12, 1988, 10 years after the Dalton report and with continued lobbying from area librarians, citizens, and the special Library Task Force, the Lincoln County commissioners voted to form the Lincoln County Library District. According to minutes from the May 4, 1989, meeting, the Library Task Force recommended the following:

"The Lincoln County Commissioners establish a library district with a tax base-supported library and service to the underserved community in Lincoln County. Other recommendations included that the board be elected by zones, that cities could opt to be excluded from the district, and that a portion of tax receipts be contracted to Lincoln City, Newport and Toledo libraries to compensate them for services offered to non-residents. Additional funds would be used for outreach services, other county-wide services, and administrative costs. Residents would be taxed at a rate which would fund these services. The suggested rate to compensate existing libraries is \$20 per capita."

Prior to the formation of the district, the county commissioners held public hearings, at which no real opposition was presented. The library district was formed "without either a vote of the county's residents or provision of a source of funding," according to district board member Ruthanne Lidman. The cities of Lincoln City, Newport, and Toledo already had libraries that were well supported by city tax revenue and were not included in the district. Later the cities of Depoe Bay, Waldport, and Yachats withdrew from the district.

The first library district board was elected on March 28, 1989. Representing five zones in the county, the new board members were Margaret Drescher (Zone

Now That We Have a District, What Do We Do?

*Forming a District:
The Lincoln County Experience*

by *Diedre Conkling*

*District Librarian
Lincoln County Library District*

1), Debbie Dowell (Zone 2), Carol Fisher (Zone 3), Anne Swinehart (Zone 4), and Ruthanne Lidman (Zone 5). Fortunately, a very strong board was elected, since they had more issues to address than any of them may have imagined. They were wise enough to seek help from local librarians and other advisors. Lidman Said:

"We convened ourselves as the Board of Directors for the first time on May 4, 1989, elected a President (me) and a Secretary pro tem (Anne Swinehart), and learned that we had inherited a debt of \$1,095.00: the cost of holding the election which put us in office! It was a bit overwhelming to start out in debt. None of us had any prior experience with running a municipal corporation; we knew nothing about Oregon budget laws . . ."

"We had so many things to learn," she continued, "and so many things to do, and we had no staff — none. We had to write and adopt by-laws, a mission statement, goals and objectives. We needed to adopt a temporary budget and convince someone to fund it! We had to purchase directors and officers insurance, design and print stationery, appoint a registered agent, and formally establish and record the district's boundaries for taxing purposes. The county commissioners provided just \$2,200 to get us through fiscal '89-90; plus, they paid off that initial debt of \$1,095."

Once the board had an operating budget and those other basics taken care of, it designed the district's long-term program, decided what the staffing requirements would be, created an appropriate budget, and wrote the necessary job descriptions. Most importantly, the board decided what kind of long-term funding base would be the best and looked for a way to make that funding happen.

During the next few months the library district board met with Jim Schepke, library development administrator for the Oregon State Library; Wayne Belmont, Lincoln County legal counsel; Ed Todd, Lincoln County assistant assessor; Dana Jenkins, elections manager; and local librarians. The board members also began touring local libraries and other library districts. They gathered information about districts from every source they discovered during their investigation. By September 30, 1989, a mission statement "Providing all Lincoln County residents with excellent library service" and goals were developed:

1. Provide fee-free access to library services and materials for all Lincoln County residents.
2. Develop countywide outreach services to the elderly, handicapped, and those lacking transportation.
3. Develop countywide preschool library programs, including adequate materials.
4. Develop countywide access to a broad range of reference services.

By February 1990 the board decided to place a measure on the May 15, 1990 ballot to establish a tax base for the library district. They decided to keep the tax base below 50 cents per \$1,000. The proposed tax base was \$416,466. A PAC, the Library Access Committee, was formed to campaign for the measure. Excellent publicity was created for the election through the PAC's efforts and the regular reports in the media about the library district development. However, the election failed by 93 votes, and it was back to the drawing board.

FUNDING—FINALLY!

Though disappointed with the election results, the library district board was not unprepared. They had developed two plans based on passage or failure of the measure. A budget request for 1990-91 funding was quickly prepared and presented to the county commissioners. At the June 19, 1990, board meeting a decision had to be made about whether to go for a serial levy or wait until November and try again for a tax base. Though it would delay funding and might have been more risky, the board decided it was best to try for a tax base to ensure stable funding.

By the end of July, new officers had been elected: Margaret Drescher, president, and Anne Swinehart, secretary. The decision had been made to keep the proposed tax base at the same amount, \$416,466. The reasons for the failure of the election had been fully discussed. It was felt that the library district might be in a stronger position if contracts for library services with the cities were developed before the election. Board members were already requesting samples of intergovernmental agreements from other library districts. The county commissioners gave the library district \$6,250 in funding for 1990-91, and the election process began again.

November 1990 was an interesting time to try to pass a tax base. Measure 5, a tax limitation measure, was

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Forming a District

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also on the ballot, and the library district board spoke out loudly against it. The library district tax base was finally approved by the voters on November 6, 1990. One local paper caught the irony of the passage of the library tax base along with the passage of Measure 5. Cameron Brandt asked in a November 21, 1990 *News-Times* editorial: "Why . . . did 14 of the precincts that voted to give the Lincoln County Library District a \$416,466 tax base also vote for the passage of Measure 5, a property tax rate cap expected to cause deep cuts in municipal library services?"

According to Brandt, of the other 19 precincts involved in the district, three voted for the district's tax base and against Measure 5, five voted against both the tax base and Measure 5, and 10 voted against the tax base and for Measure 5. One precinct voted for the tax base and tied over Measure 5.

NOT THE END OF THE STORY

The library district board was thrilled that the tax base measure passed and that they were assured funding in 1991-92 but the tax revenue would not be received until late November or early December 1991. They had to decide when to hire a director, develop a contract for the director, advertise the position, conduct interviews, and hire someone. They were continuing to work on an intergovernmental agreement with the cities that would allow fee-free service to people living in the county/district. Insurance for the district and staff was needed. They needed to develop the 1991-92 budget. Funding to tide the district over until November was also needed.

Believe it or not, all of this was accomplished by July 1, 1991. They had hired help for some parts of the process, but the majority of the work was done by this volunteer board of directors. Lidman did much of the work of a director when she served as board president. After her resignation from the board, she was awarded a professional services contract with the library district and continued with this effort.

The members of the board in 1990-91 were Margaret Drescher, president; Fredda Butler; Carol Fisher; and Anne Swinehart, secretary pro tem. Susan Garner and Bette Owens filled vacancies. Board members met with library boards and city councils in their efforts to get intergovernmental agreements approved. They developed a very professional and lasting contract for a library director. They applied for and received an LSCA grant, and they basically spent many hours out in the community talking about the library district.

Of course, others played a strong role in the success of the district. The local librarians, Blythe Jorgenson (Toledo), Carole Dickerson (Newport), Patty Heringer (Lincoln City), Jane Appling (Newport), Janet Webster (Guin Library, Hatfield Marine Science Center), and others were an integral part of the whole process. The support, participation, and leadership roles taken on by the local librarians really made the formation of the library district possible. County Counsel, Wayne Belmont, has continued to give his support to the library district, with the approval of the county commissioners. The others involved with this process are too numerous to name.

The intergovernmental agreements that were approved by most of the cities after about a year and a half of work also helped give the libraries and the library district direction. Contracts were offered to all of the cities. The city of Yachats turned it down. The city of Waldport signed a contract and received funding for a year before the city was annexed into the library district. The cities of Newport, Toledo, and Lincoln City all signed contracts by July 1991. Siletz was the only city annexed into the library district, November 6, 1990. It also signed a contract.

Efforts continued to annex the cities of Waldport, Depoe Bay, and Yachats into the library district. Annexation of the city of Waldport was placed on the November 1991 ballot and was defeated. Annexation measures for the cities of Waldport and Depoe Bay were placed on the May 1992 ballot, this time they passed. The extra effort put forth by citizens in both communities made these successes possible. Yachats is the only city that still has not placed the annexation issue on a ballot. The Yachats City Council has agreed to put it on a ballot "some time in the future" several times, but no date has ever been set.

The Lincoln County Library District Board hired me as the first director. I began working for the district on July 8, 1991. I had moved to Oregon from the Weber County Library System, Utah, in January 1991 and took a temporary position as a reference librarian at Linfield College. That job was fun and helped me realize that I really did want to continue working in Oregon. Serving as the district librarian has been very interesting. This is an exciting position that is constantly changing. I feel very fortunate to have had the opportunity to play a role in the development of the Lincoln County Library District.

We have accomplished many things since July 1991. But that is another story. Give us a call to find out more. 