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Nancy Andersen
Wilsonville Public Library

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Clackamas County Levy 1997

by Nancy Andersen
Board Member
Wilsonville Public Library

Clackamas County libraries have been funded for 20 years by a county-wide renewable serial levy. There are 13 libraries in the county, deriving varying percentages of their total operating budgets from this county levy. The levy in place in 1996 was due to expire July 1, 1997. Since the passage in November of Measure 47, requiring a double majority, we knew we had a monumental task ahead of us. We felt that it should not be applied to this levy, since it was a renewal, not a 'new' tax, but had no assurance that our views would be upheld.

On Saturday, December 7, 1996 a meeting was held to organize a campaign and line up workers to get this levy passed in March 1997. Joanna Rood of LINCC (Library Information Network of Clackamas County) organized the meeting by spreading the word of an organizational meeting regarding passing the levy, to all the libraries in the county. A large number turned out to see and hear what was happening.

There was an opportunity to sign up for various tasks, including the Executive Committee, consisting of a chairperson, PAC treasurer, Secretary, and Chairs of Fundraising committee, Publicity/Collateral Materials committee and Message/Speakers Bureau committee as well as a Library Liaison/Advisor for each of the above. The Fundraising Committee consisted of a chairperson and coordinators of fundraising events, donations solicitation, and "asking influential people for their support"; along with a Library liaison advisor and general 'helpers'. The Message/Speaker's Bureau committee also had a chairperson and a coordinator of speaker's bureau calendar, a Library Liaison advisor, and general 'helpers'. In addition, a Community Captain was designated for each library in the county.

At this meeting, the name of the PAC was decided on: Renew Our Library Levy. We wanted to emphasize the idea that this was not a new, but a continuation or renewal of an existing levy and also wanted a name that would provide us with a good and easy acronym.

It was decided that the Executive Committee would meet weekly. (We had to be careful to hold our meetings in public meeting rooms so we could not be called to task for preferential treatment, lobbying on public time, etc.) The Community Captains were encouraged to attend all Executive Committee meet-

ings and overall the attendance was very good. That way we got input from all the various communities at once so decisions could be made more quickly. Time was of the essence since we had less than four weeks until Voter Pamphlet statements had to be submitted. These, of course, had to be accompanied by payment for same. Friends groups were of great assistance in this.

FUNDRAISING

- The Fundraising Committee went first to Friends groups since they could be counted on in a hurry for support.
- Volunteers and library staff were strongly encouraged to contribute. Literature could legally be placed in staff lounges.
- Unions. OPEU in Wilsonville made donations of cash and time for a demonstration.

PUBLICITY

- Flyer asking for volunteer help and money was first priority. Tear-off sheet provided choices for volunteer activities and donations.
- Flyers developed were handed out at shopping malls and anywhere possible. Signs were posted in all businesses who agreed; also at least one post office approved.
- Message was "50 percent or BUST!" Emphasis on getting 50 percent of voters to vote because without the renewal of the levy, all the county's libraries would be severely curtailed, and some closed.
- One "factual, not too attractive flyer" (which had to be checked minutely by the State Attorney General for propriety) was mass-mailed to all homes in the county by LINCC. ROLL didn't have money for mailing so factual was used with gratitude.
- Lawn sign design was approved and signs ordered. Community captains requested quantity desired and arranged work parties to put them up.
- Reader boards were a good source of publicity in some areas.
- Press releases were sent to radio stations. Radio and TV appearances were secured. Local communities were expected to supply their own newspapers with publicity and information. A series of articles carried in one newspaper was distributed to other communities also.
- A resident of a retirement home printed, at her own expense, flyers and a cover letter which went into every mail box there.
- A saturation mailing to certain zip codes considered to be most effective was done with a post

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card bearing the message "Your vote counts more than ever! Remember to return your ballot by March 11th."

- Mark Hatfield endorsed the campaign and an ad was purchased in the *Oregonian* using his letter and picture.
- Ads were placed in local newspapers.

SPEAKERS BUREAU

- Organized people to speak to groups. Prepared sample speeches.
- Communities did their own scheduling of speaking to School Boards, parent groups and local service clubs.

GET OUT THE VOTE (GOTV) COMMITTEE

- A 'computer whiz' was located who could compile phone numbers from registrar's lists for little money. (Later the Union said they had voters' phone numbers and would have shared them with us. Since the other plan was already in effect, we didn't follow up to find particulars of this offer, but it is something to keep in mind if needed again.)
- Names were divided into three groups: those who 'always vote' (who were not called), those who 'sometimes vote' and those who 'never vote'. "Sometimes vote" was targeted.
- Two callings were scheduled. Sites to be used were arranged in local areas by community captains. Insurance companies and banks often good sites. Times were 6-9 PM weekdays and some weekend times.
- A script was prepared, along with instructions for callers, which included having them mark the lists to indicate support for Libraries in order to have names to form a volunteer pool for the future.
- With lots of absentee voting now, those people contacted who expected to be out of town were given instructions for receiving ballots at vacation addresses.
- Postcards were sent with a "Have you returned your ballot?" message to the non-voters.

There was last minute optimism when the Attorney General handed down an opinion that a renewing levy should not be considered a new tax; and therefore not require the 50 percent voter turnout. The actual turnout was 41.32 percent (more than twice the turnout in the last levy election) and 72.8 percent approval. Of course this still was quite short of the 50 percent turnout requirement (presuming the voter rolls were actually current, which from our phoning experience, seemed dubious). However, on the strength of the Attorney General's opinion, the Clackamas County Board of Commissioners tentatively declared the measure passed.

Post election activity included a statement in the voters pamphlet endorsing the proposed rewrite of Measure 47. Also a complaint was filed with the Secretary of State about the voter rolls in Clackamas County. And of course there was some inevitable fallout which left some people saying "you lied to us . . . you never would have closed the libraries." Letters were sent to editors to attempt to explain this.

Aided by a very good and powerful lobbyist, the rewrite of Measure 47, which came to be Measure 50, included specific and clear language relative to renewing levies. To wit: levies, as such, are no more. All taxes collected go into the general fund of the taxing agency to be dealt with at that level. Passage in May of this measure also resolved any remaining doubt about our levy by specific language.

We here in Clackamas County are fortunate in that our Board of County Commissioners have always been strong advocates and supporters of libraries. They have agreed to allocate to the libraries 14 percent of the total property tax collected for five years. This comes very close to duplicating the old levy, which had to be renewed every three years. The funding level is almost as good as it was before '47' and gives us the stability to plan and budget operations.

This campaign was a demonstration of excellent collaboration and hard work by many volunteers on a very tight time schedule. The work done by two of the volunteers earned them the Olé awards at the OLA 1997 conference. 