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Cooperation out on the Eastern Oregon Frontier

by Ken Reading,
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Libraries in Eastern Oregon have a long and successful history of cooperation in satisfying the needs of patrons throughout the ten-county region. They know first hand the benefits of equal access in a huge area that covers forty-three percent of the state of Oregon. Those who support and manage Eastern Oregon libraries are also very familiar with the unique problems of these small, short-hour, rural libraries that predominate the region. Over time we have seen some of our rural libraries accomplish much as they struggle alone to provide services with

low funding levels. What is uncommon in Eastern Oregon is to see the size and scope of cooperation that exists. It didn't happen overnight. The hopes and dreams of all Eastern Oregon frontier librarians have been building for decades. Sure, like most libraries, the needs and the service passions have always been here and they have always been high. Eastern Oregon libraries, like libraries that accomplish things anywhere, could wear well the old saying "it ain't the size

of the dog in the fight, it's the size of the fight in the dog." But that does not answer the question of why there is so much successful cooperation in our part of the state. So what is the answer? Simply said, it is trust. We know each other pretty well. We are good neighbors that depend on each other for help. That's it. It's really that simple.

Fostering all this trust over the years has been the Eastern Oregon Library Association (EOLA) which includes academic, public, school and special libraries. EOLA has been the main catalyst for better service since the early 1950s. Without question, most of the high-impact cooperative service accomplishments in the region over the last few years are due to the influence of EOLA.

It is quite startling to look back and view the number of projects that have, like dominoes, served as building blocks for better regional service. It is also no surprise that these projects have been related to the region's greatest needs: communications, technology, and planning. Since 1986, the following Eastern Oregon cooperative library projects highlight EOLA's unique regional cooperative history. At the same time they continue to prepare the way for the future:

1988 the "On-line Reference Service to Eastern Oregon Libraries" project was funded by a combination of Meyer Memorial Trust and LSCA grants and awarded to Eastern Oregon State College (EOSC). The project placed twenty microcomputers and ten fax machines in libraries throughout the region for use in

searching online reference databases. This spawned the regional bulletin board system (BBS) that allowed for electronic messages and interlibrary loans between libraries.

1988 the "Umatilla-Morrow Counties Resource Sharing" project was funded by an LSCA grant that provided an automated library system hosted at Blue Mountain Community College (BMCC) to serve libraries in Umatilla and Morrow counties. The six largest public libraries and BMCC are online while smaller, remote libraries are served by dial-up with an annual CD-ROM catalog.

1990 Eastern Oregon School Libraries Network (EOSLN) received funding from Meyer Memorial Trust providing fax machines for thirty-six school libraries.

1991 EOSC receives an LSCA grant on behalf of EOLA for the "East Central Oregon Network" to provide an automated system for Union and Baker Counties and to serve as host to the bibliographic records of libraries in Baker, Grant, Union and Wallowa counties.

1992 EOSLN and EOLA collaborate on a \$30,300 Meyer Memorial Trust funded grant to provide a resource sharing blueprint for the region.

1993 the "Southeast Oregon Library Network (SOLN)" project was funded by an LSCA grant that provided consulting assisting and an automated library resource sharing system for Treasure Valley Community College, Malheur County Public Library, and Ontario High School.

1996 the "Pioneer II Expansion" project was funded by an LSCA grant that expanded existing resource sharing access to remote school and public libraries in Malheur County.

Public libraries in rural Eastern Oregon may soon get even another boost. A 1998-99 LSTA planning grant currently in process is designed to develop a unified plan of public library service for the entire ten-county region for the 21st century. This EOLA planning project recognizes that Eastern Oregon public libraries have always lagged behind the rest of the state in providing comparable quality library service. The project proposes to make recommendations for a reasonably funded service plan for a unified ten-county regional library system by the end of 1998 to provide excellent library services to all 170,000 residents of Eastern Oregon. The consultant team is from the Northwest: Dallas Shaffer of Bainbridge Island, Ruth Metz of Portland, and Douglas Young of Bozeman, Montana.

A ten-county regional library system for Eastern Oregon could do many things. It could serve a larger area

than any public library in the United States, excluding Alaska (41,178 square miles). It could serve a larger area than five New England states combined (New Hampshire, Vermont, Massachusetts, Rhode Island and Connecticut). It could, as mentioned before, serve forty three percent of the area of the state of Oregon. It could serve the third largest population in Oregon after the Multnomah County Library and the Salem Public Library. It could also provide a new national model for quality public library services to rural communities in the 21st century.

As the Ten-County Planning project progressed, an interesting dichotomy began to surface. Even though there was a large degree of trust, there were emerging fears that needed to be addressed and quickly. So we did the logical thing. We called together a "fears" meeting about three months into the project and identified eight fear categories that needed attention:

Buildings: There was a fear that local library buildings and property ownership might be taken away. Would any new buildings, remodeling and furnishings be funded locally or regionally? Who would make these decisions?

Staff: The group did not want to see staff become accountable to people that did not understand library principles and practices. There was the fear of losing local control of personnel, wages, and benefits. There was also a misunderstanding of to whom staff would report under a regional system.

Document delivery/Courier: The fear was that delivery services would be less than adequate.

Collections: Regional cooperative acquisitions would be all right, but not loss of local selection and weeding control. There was also fear of losing support for local special collections.

Training: In-house vs. centralization and loss of individualization were issues.

Services: Equitable, basic services without loss of local uniqueness, customization, and/or local preferences were important. Also, we did not want to lose our local strong points because of the plan.

Funding: There was fear of not enough funding to support what we already had and that the plan would not produce stable and equitable funding.

Governance: We did not want a larger system that would mean a slower, less efficient work-flow. We did not want to be governed by idiots! We did not want to be governed by someone far away. We did not want to lose a voice in management of the new organization.

Because of distance we did not want a few people running things only because they had the ability to attend meetings.

All of the above fears are being taken seriously as the plan continues to evolve and we feel that they will all be solved.

Service goals for the proposed new regional library plan would be simple. First, it would be easy, fast, and efficient for residents to find, get, and use the information resources they want and need. Second, it would create the informational basis for the region's economic vitality and quality of life. Third, it would strengthen the ability of community libraries to serve the public, be cultural centers, and provide links to information. Fourth, it would insure maximum value for dollars spent.



Site visit at Enterprise Public Library by Ruth Metz, Consultant, Ken Reading, Project Director, and Duncan Lagoe from Joseph, Oregon

By creating a ten county regional library system that provides for adequate and basic services for patrons in their communities EOLA public librarians can:

- Lower prices. By joining together and becoming more efficient costs can be reduced by spreading them over a larger base of libraries.
- Develop services like tapes by mail, cataloging and processing, children's services, collection development, consulting or direct-service assistance, local and regional programs, financial development, and regional publicity and promotion of services.
- Win more grant and endowment money for the region.
- Contribute to regional economic growth by operating information and economic development services accessible directly by the public and by librarians.
- Increase the quality of life by raising service levels and partnerships (e.g. distance learning, job information, homework help, school relationships, business recruiting).
- Break existing isolation and improve management.
- Provide a regional governance structure consisting of Citizen Advisory Councils that will raise and discuss policy issues and concerns and advise a regionally elected board. A regional Librarians Council could develop annual service plans.

As we move into the final phases of the Ten County Library District planning process we are finding mostly widespread support for the project. We all recognize the complexity of what we are trying to accomplish. As of the deadline for this article, there appears to be a consensus that a multi-year simulation of the most important planning elements may be the wisest. By “practicing” being a regional library system we could:

- Put as much of the regional service model components into place quickly while awaiting the proposed elections that would enable regional and/or other funding to come forward.
- Find out what these proposed services really would cost and if they will make a real difference to library services in the region.
- Test a model for the region that includes the major components of the models our consultants have recommended without having to choose “blindly” a model that we would have to live with.

Multnomah County Library *(continued from page)*

“BLAST OFF” WITH MULTNOMAH COUNTY LIBRARY’S A SCIENCE ODYSSEY PROGRAM

Multnomah County Library was the only Oregon location and one of 125 community organizations and individuals across the country selected as a site for A Science Odyssey, a national PBS outreach initiative coordinated by WGBH in Boston. The Library’s A Science Odyssey goal was to connect young people with science through library programs during spring and summer 1998.

Multnomah County Library created six science-theme programs to complement PBS’s A Science Odyssey television series, which aired on public broadcasting in winter 1998. These library programs included activities created by Youth Services and by WGBH and the Museum of Science in Boston. The programs, aimed at fourth through eighth graders, included the following:

- **Mountain Maker, Earth Shaker:** volcanoes, plate tectonics, rock collecting
- **The Unique You:** genetics, fingerprints, taste buds, eye and hair color
- **A Drop of Water:** surface tension, water molecules
- **Eye-Popping Illusions:** optical illusions, kaleidoscopes
- **Blast Off!:** gravity, constellations, the moon
- **Electric Attraction:** circuits, electricity, magnets, static

Upper elementary and middle school youth explored five or six hands-on activities for each program. Multnomah County Library promoted A Science Odyssey program to home schooling families.

- Adjust and refine the model that really works best for us as we learn from the test.
- Be prepared to give real data to our citizens who will eventually need to support legislation and ballot measures to establish a regional library system.
- Turn our energies toward “doing” services we think will better serve Eastern Oregonians, while continuing to hone the governance and structure of the system, incorporating our real experience being a region.
- Demonstrate to funding authorities the ability of our libraries, governing boards and citizens to collaborate in the best interests of serving Eastern Oregon residents.

All of us out here on the Eastern Oregon frontier say “Howdy pardner” and “Let’er buck!” on behalf of library cooperation in the 21st century. **Q**

The Library also sponsored a successful A Science Odyssey camp-in for 180 youth and parents in April 1998. This overnight program included interactive science activities and a presentation by the director of the Western Bigfoot Society. Numerous county citizens emailed and mailed the Library with thanks for these educational programs. One grateful parent wrote, “These programs were wonderful, hands-on science lessons for children. The topics were interesting, the instructor enthusiastic, and supporting materials were appropriate.”

Multnomah County Library School Corps continued to present A Science Odyssey throughout summer 1998 to culturally and economically diverse youth at summer schools, community centers, and Boys and Girls Clubs around the county. Overall, Youth Services provided more than seventy programs, reaching over 2000 county youth, ages nine to thirteen.

Patrons consistently requested that Multnomah County Library provide more hands-on learning programs in the future. As a result, the Library has planned “Hands-on-History,” a series of programs that explore different eras in world history, for fall 1998 and winter 1999.

A Science Odyssey is fun and had positive reactions from parents and youth. Here’s a great opportunity to present a program at your local library where all the planning has been done for you by WGBH and Multnomah County Library. Each program is most appropriate for grades four through eight and especially popular with home schooling families. **Q**

For information about A Science Odyssey programs, contact Kate Houston, Multnomah County Library (503) 736-6012, kateho@nethost.multnomah.lib.or.us