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## First you have an earthquake...the Molalla public library project

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# First You Have to Have an Earthquake... the Molalla Public Library Project

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In March of 1993 the “Spring Break Quake” struck the upper Willamette Valley. In the City of Molalla the most significant impact was on the high school’s main building, which was so badly damaged that it was condemned and eventually demolished. Behind that main building there is an addition built in the 1970’s, the bulk of which houses the school district’s administrative offices. Also in that addition, and unused since the earthquake, was the old high school’s former library—approximately 10,000 square feet of prime library space.

In August of 1996 the City hired me as the new City Librarian. Shortly thereafter, then City Administrator Harvey Barnes took me over to that empty high school library. The old school building was being demolished, and the library itself was cluttered with the remnants of the quake—broken furniture, puddles of water from a badly leaking roof, exposed ceiling fixtures and other odds and ends.

“Randy,” Harvey asked me, “what do you think of this as the future home of the Molalla Public Library?” With a facility housed in a very crowded 2,000 square foot space, and no other prospects for expansion, I could only smile.

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with the Molalla River School District to lease the high school’s empty library space as the new location of the Molalla Public Library. The School District agreed to lease the library space, and added to the lease the grounds on which the original high school building had stood, to be used for the development of a city park. This agreement formed the foundation of the new library project. Without the School District’s cooperation and support, there would have been no library project at all.

By 1996 the city had set aside \$180,000 in capital funds for a new library. At that time it was estimated that an additional \$100,000 would be necessary to renovate the former high school library and complete the move. The city submitted an LSCA grant to the State Library, and was successful in securing \$100,000 in funding. With that funding the city contracted with the architectural firm Dull, Olsen, and Weeks to prepare plans for the renovation.

As a result of the initial proposal from the architects, it became apparent that the renovation would cost considerably more than was initially anticipated. As mentioned earlier, the roof was letting more water in than it was keeping out. The rooftop heating unit was not a stand-alone system as had been thought, but rather a slave to the main boiler that had been in the demolished high school building. It was also determined that while the building had heating, it had not been air-conditioned. Power to the building was also found to be inadequate to support the number of computer terminals required. And so on, and so on. Clearly, more funding was needed.

By this time the city had a new administrator, Gene Green. Congresswoman Darlene Hooley had contacted Mr. Green and the city’s mayor, Mike Clarke, and asked whether the city had any projects that she might be able to assist with. After discussing a number of options, it was decided that the library project was the most appropriate. Congresswoman Hooley and her staff began work on obtaining \$400,000 in funding for the renovation.

It is very different working with a Foundation or other granting agency than it is working directly with your congressional representative. Foundations and granting agencies have published deadlines, application forms and criteria; Congresswoman Hooley was working through the federal budget process. This process is lengthy and, to the layperson, a difficult maze to navigate. It requires a great amount of time on the part of the Congresswoman and her staff as they track each piece of legislation they sponsor through every step of the process.

Working with Congresswoman Hooley and her staff, one begins to get a glimpse of how hard they work and how busy they are. Successful legislation requires an incredible amount of time and organization. We were fortunate indeed to have in Darlene Hooley a represen-

tative with a genuine interest in public libraries. We did not have to sell her on the project or persuade her of the value of a library to a small rural community. She has a long history of supporting libraries and is particularly knowledgeable and well spoken on the relevant issues. She was willing to dedicate her time and her staff's time to seeing this project through. Not every elected official has this background, even though they may have the desire. With all the demands on her time, her work on this project was extraordinary.

In short, working with your congressperson is not an impersonal process. It requires two-way communication; it also requires patience. Progress comes in fits and starts, with long periods of seeming inaction followed by a flurry of activity. Because we were understandably very anxious to secure the funds, we made frequent calls just to "check in." My recommendation is that you begin developing a relationship with your congressional representative now before you need that contact. Send an occasional letter describing any projects or programs you see coming down the road. Keep in touch with his or her local staff. Find out what interests them, what their specialty is. If they offer to help with a project, enlist that help. Congresswoman Hooley's success in getting funding for our project was unusual, but her willingness to help was not.

Once the money was successfully appropriated, the next step was disbursing funds to the city. In our case, the funds were assigned to the Institute of Museum and Library Services as part of the Library Services and Technology Act Leadership program. We received a letter from Joyce Ray, Director of the Office of Library Services, indicating that we had been awarded a non-competitive grant under the guidelines of that program. We were instructed to fill out a grant application and send it in. I called the Institute with questions and had those questions answered quickly and professionally. All of the Office of Library Services staff have been both knowledgeable and helpful.

Because the bulk of our financial need for the library project was for construction and renovation, and the IMLS no longer funds this type of project, a series of discussions between our staff and the staffs of the Institute and Congresswoman Hooley's office became necessary. These discussions resulted in a clear understanding of what funds may be used for what purposes. On April 6th, 2000 the city held a meeting for potential project bidders, with bids due on the 20th of April. By the time you read this the bid should have been awarded, and the project should be underway. We hope to be in our new home by mid-October of 2000.

Fund-raising, as you all know, is an art unto itself. Having spent the majority of my career as an academic librarian, and most of those years at private colleges, I was used to either getting a call from our Development Office with a request for information to be used in a proposal, or in writing a rough draft of a proposal, sending it to the Development Office, and either getting a

quick rejection or having the money mysteriously show up some time later. The audience for whom I wrote the draft was an internal department completely familiar with the institution, its goals, objectives and overall needs. This changes completely when you yourself are the entire development department—and this is but a small part of the rest of your job. It requires a heavy time commitment and an environment that allows you to take the time needed.

There is no magic solution when seeking outside funds. Was working with Congresswoman Hooley and the Institute for Museum and Library Services easier than working with a private foundation or other government body? Was it easier, and did it have a greater potential for success than seeking voter approval of a bond issue? The answer is: it wasn't better and it wasn't worse, it was just different. Each project, and each library, has different strengths and weaknesses, a different community and a different web of connections to other communities, people and organizations. To raise funds successfully, you must know your potential funding sources, maximize your strengths, and expand your connections.

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During the time we were working with Congresswoman Hooley, we were also adding new services to the existing library, expanding library hours, developing new children's programs, and paying close attention to adding new books and periodicals that met targeted community needs. We also received a number of smaller grants and in-kind contributions focused on advancing existing services and programs. As a result, we were able to continually generate positive reports on circulation growth and overall use of the existing library. As the old adage goes, "nothing succeeds like success." We were also very active in working with community groups and organizations to establish partnerships to help meet overall community needs. We made it a priority to develop broad-based, comprehensive community support.

Ultimately, success can be achieved in your community by teaming with a funding source that believes in your project, either because of their mission and history, or because of your success in educating them and developing a strong relationship. I hope this information has been useful. If I can be of help to anyone working on a project for his or her library, please feel free to contact me by mail at the Molalla Public Library, P.O. Box 208, Molalla, OR 97038, by telephone at 503.829.2593, or by email at [moplcom@molalla.net](mailto:moplcom@molalla.net).