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*Jackson County Library System*

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# Staff Development Day

by Anne Billeter  
Jackson County Library System

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*A day to love, a day to hate; a day to prepare for;  
a day to relax, listen, and visit; a day to learn.*

For many years Staff Development Day, or SDD, has meant many things to many people in Jackson County. For a library system with 15 branch libraries, a staff of 100, a cadre of substitutes, and a flourish of volunteers, SDD has provided the opportunity to bring everyone together, to provide workshop opportunities for a great many staff members simultaneously, and to develop a sense of vision, purpose, and pride.

Prior to 1985 we enjoyed cooperative Staff Development Days with the Josephine County Library System. The synergy of meeting counterparts from another library system, of taking workshops from and presenting workshops to non-Jackson County staff, created an energy and excitement that is still remembered. Those SDDs were discontinued when budgets were severely cut due to a reduction in county revenue.

When the first of four Jackson County Library System serial levies began in 1985, planning for staff development was an integral part of the new era. Two days per year were designated as SDDs, with the entire library system closed for staff training. Planning for the next SDD began as soon as the previous one was over. October and May, and Wednesdays, were selected for a great many, often interactive, reasons, with the least inconvenience to library patrons as the major consideration. A committee was formed to plan each SDD. Sometimes people were appointed to the committee, sometimes they volunteered, and sometimes they were urged. During the first years an effort was made to include representatives of all types of services and locations. For example, it was believed that Medford and Ashland should always be represented, that at least one if not two Branch Supervisors should be on the committee, and that Circulation, Reference, Children's Services, Young Adult Services, and the Processing Center should all have representatives. Over the years the size of the committee was reduced, with the understanding that the first two meetings, where the concept for the next SDD was developed, would be open to any who wished to attend or to send suggestions to the committee. Committee members generally were expected to serve for two SDDs, although some continued for many more.

Four goals were developed for Staff Development Day:

1. To develop a common purpose or vision regarding our work
2. To provide social interaction so we can get to know one another better
3. To instill a sense of pride and inspiration
4. To provide an opportunity for learning

Each SDD was given a name that suggested a theme for the day. Some examples are:

*All in the Family*  
*Building a Bridge*  
*It's Still Changing*  
*Greater Expectations*  
*Back to Books*  
*Libraries for Lifelong Learning*  
*Book Love*  
*The Tough Stuff*  
*Spring Festival of Learning*  
*Jackson County: Building the Future Together*

For many years SDD was eight hours long, beginning at 8 a.m. and ending at 5 p.m. In later years, this was reduced to six or six and one half hours. There were many reasons for the reduction, including: eight hours of staff training was exhausting—it was especially hard on the committee, who had to arrive at least an hour early in order to do setup, and stay after to do take-down; and it was hard on workshop presenters, who had to squeeze their workshop setup into a very full day of activities in which they were expected to participate. In addition, many of the staff are part-time, with commitments which conflicted with their required attendance at this full eight hour day.

The schedule for the day has varied considerably over the years, with each committee trying to respond to suggestions and reactions to previous SDDs. There were usually from one to three workshop sessions, several speakers or panel presentations, an update from the Library Director, and door prizes (donated by generous staff members). Several times we included brainstorming sessions.

There have been some notable deviations. One SDD was devoted to learning about Jackson County government. The day included a tour of the departments housed in the courthouse, presentations to the whole group by department directors from outlying departments, and a large packet of handouts from the departments. We devoted another SDD to an "Open Space" format: A whole group meeting at the beginning of the day created the list of issues to be discussed. Each issue was then addressed by a small group of those interested in the issue. The immediate result was a 41 page document including the recorder's notes for each of the discussion groups. The long range re-

sults were many, including the development of a vision statement, the availability of Spanish language brush-up classes, more emphasis on recycling, distribution of the weekly staff newsletter by mail to substitutes, and many more.

There have also been some days that required flexibility to make last minute changes. One of the most successful days was Caroline B. Cooney's last minute availability as a speaker. She more than achieved our objectives: she talked about books (she fired up many to read the books), she gave us the sense of being a unified group of people with a common vision, she entertained, she enthralled.


There have been many high points: when Kitty Griffiths shared with us her feelings and experiences with her outreach patrons; when Anne Guevara and Walt Wright booktalked us into an immediate need to read those books and find out what happened; when Jim Schepke gave us a vision of public library service to children in the twenty-first century; when Mari Brabbin showed us that change, both good and bad, is something we can prepare for; the naming of our Employee of the Year; the skit in which a real Medford police officer discovered part way through the skit that he was the bad guy (as directed by the script, he asked who had checked out a library book).

There have been some low points: the poorly lighted, acoustically and chair-challenged church basement where we held one SDD is a notable one. However the most notable low point may well be the SDD we didn't have. When we were automating our catalog and circulation system, closing a branch at a time in order to barcode all of the books, planning to close the Medford Headquarters Library for a week for barcoding in the spring, we all agreed that it was too much: too much for the library patrons to have the library closed ANOTHER day, too much for the staff to have to prepare and attend the usual spring SDD, so we canceled it. It was a good decision, for all of the above reasons. It was a bad decision, we discovered, because by the next fall SDD we had many morale problems, a sense of division into splinter groups, an "us versus them" frame of mind. The consensus of the management team was that NOT having the spring SDD had fragmented the staff, had in some non-measurable way lost us our sense of common vision, purpose, and pride. We promised ourselves to schedule two SDDs a year. The loss, we felt, was more than the gain. That worked for many years, but not forever. Nothing does.

SDD waxed, and now it has waned. Faced with the massive training requirements of migration from a homegrown automated system to Polaris and with the intensive planning and preparation for rebuilding 15 library buildings, we agreed to cancel the fall, 1999 SDD, and to decide later whether or not to have one in spring, 2000.

Although many Jackson County Library staff members consider Staff Development Day and staff training to be synonymous, they are not. SDD has always been only one of many ways in which JCLS staff receive training. Many staff members attend state and national conferences, some are presenters at state and regional conferences and workshops, and many staff members attend in-house training opportunities.

The strength of Staff Development Day is the impact of seeing all 150 of us together in one room, and of realizing we are all working together for the same goal: to provide the best possible library service to the people of Jackson County.

The challenge of Staff Development Day is to achieve the goals of SDD for every single one of the 150 people who attend. 

*Anne Billeter is the Collection Development Manager of Jackson County Library System. She served on the SDD Committee for many years, while wearing her "staff development" hat.*

### **Common Ground Rules for Open Space Discussion Groups**

#### *The Law of Two Feet*

An open space meeting has four guidelines:

1. Whoever comes are the right people.
2. Whatever happens is the only thing that could have.
3. Whenever it starts is the right time. Creativity and innovation never run by the clock.
4. When it's over, it's over.

The one overarching law, the Law of Two Feet: If at any time during our time together you are neither learning nor contributing, use them to go elsewhere.