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How to Stay Perky During Trying Times!

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How to Stay Perky During Trying Times!

by Sara Charlton
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The Tillamook County Library System will soon replace a derelict, converted auto dealership main library with a new state-of-the-art 30,000 square foot facility. This achievement results from ten years of planning, and the active pursuit of public input and involvement. Public involvement, “We want your ideas” and the existence of an activist Library Board, Library Foundation and a separate building committee were essential to the process. Convincing county residents that their library needed to change has been a long and sometimes disheartening process.

One example, the selection of a site for a new library, illustrates the critical importance of public input. Geographical circumstance, particularly size and flood-free considerations, had severely limited potential sites within the City of Tillamook, the county seat. A regular patron learned that the local Copeland Lumberyard was closing, and suggested that we investigate. Fortunately the Copeland family proved to be library-friendly folks. Following negotiations they agreed to terms, which we were able to meet. Contingency funds from the library budget financed this purchase. The Tillamook County Library, (main library, five branches, and bookmobile) is funded by an operating levy.

Having secured our site, we went shopping for an architect. After numerous presentations, Mr. Richard Turi of North Bend was selected. Mr. Turi, a ‘full-service’ architect, handles all details, and has built and modified numerous Oregon libraries. Especially impressive was Mr. Turi’s willingness to consult with the public, library board, and staff. The building plans that resulted have been applauded by all.

Having now gained a plan to go with our building site, we then began the process of financing our \$4,000,000 project. The Metropolitan Group was selected to assist with our fund raising. With J.S. May’s guidance, we developed a game plan for our fund raising, which so far has been highly successful.

In 1999 the County Board of Commissioners were not in favor of putting our bond measure on the ballot. In 2000, with two new commissioners in place, the Library Board met with the Board of Commissioners to gain their approval for a petition drive. After gaining sufficient nominating petition signatures, (in our case, 1,000) a bond measure went on the November 2002 General Election ballot. Despite safety issues that had closed off once public spaces and failing electrical, roof and heating systems, the ballot measure failed 45 percent yes, 55 percent no.

Those of us who had worked so hard were stunned. (‘Numbed’ might be a better word.) Particularly disheartening were the comments of those who claimed to support the project, but who had not bothered to vote because they “knew” it would pass. Another problem was that the printer of the ballots had left off a required legal sentence on our ballot. Oregon Law required that all voters had to be sent a post card notice with the deleted legal sentence clearly stated. Some voters claimed that we were lying on the ballot.

After our grieving, the Library Board and Foundation met with the architect and fund raiser. Having no choice, we decided to rework our campaign and try again. This time the bond amount would be reduced by half a million dollars. Our fund raiser advised us to focus on 13 bullet points describing what the Main Library does for the branches, the bookmobile and all patrons. The collective effort was reinforced by an architectural evaluation advising that our old library could only be repaired by reconstruction at a cost greater than that of the proposed new library.

This time I stayed behind the scenes and let the Political Action Committee (PAC) make all the public appearances. Library staff worked after hours and days off to distribute posters, brochures, and staff the phone bank, etc. The PAC worked on asking for

A Challenging Decision

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policy went into effect. We included a process for unblocking Web sites that are erroneously blocked. Interestingly, our first request to change the default setting was from the mother of an 8-year-old girl who wanted her daughter to have unfiltered access. During the nearly three months of operation, we have had 40 requests to change the default settings (divided roughly in half for unfiltered access for 12 and under and filtered access for teens) and a handful of requests to unblock Web sites.

Overall, we are pleased with our decision and the process that led us to it. We believe we considered the divergent points-of-view in Multnomah County,

protecting intellectual freedom and open access while supporting parents' rights to make decisions for their own children. Do we believe that the issue of filtering the Internet is over as a result of that decision? Of course not; it will never be over. 

Molly Raphael is the Director of the Multnomah County Library. Prior to her current position, she served as Director of the District of Columbia Public Library in Washington, DC. She has been an active member of the American Library Association for 30 years, currently serving as an ALA Councilor-at-Large.

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more donations than the last bond. Our local newspaper lent great support, and used every opportunity to illustrate the benefits of a new main library. Our ads on the radio station pushed every button possible, from children talking, to a singer singing one of our "Singing Librarians" songs.

Our second campaign clearly benefited by reworking the telephone bank. The County Employees' Union donated money and provided the voter update list so those who had not voted were called each week until they did! With volunteers fully briefed, and provided with information sheets, every current voter in Tillamook County was called during the early evening hours as soon as mail-in ballots were distributed.

The September 2003 election resulted in a far heavier turnout and saw the Tillamook Library bond pass by 51 percent!

Ground breaking for our new facility occurred on March 26, 2005. Fund

raising has so far added \$630,000, to our \$3,700,000 bond. The bids were opened May 24th. The Commissioners voted to approve the contractor on June 8th. We plan to open July 1, 2006 exactly 10 years since the Library Board voted to go for a new Library!

Without the hardworking efforts of the Library PAC, Board, Foundation, Staff, the Commissioners, as well as our supportive patrons, we would still have the ugliest, outgrown, falling apart library in the State of Oregon! Change can be a lot of work, but the benefits are wonderful. 

Sara Charlton, Tillamook County Library Director, 1998-99 OLA President, 1999-2005 Legislative Committee member, 1992-95 Public Relation Chair, Trainer of the Library parades ferrets, Tap Dancer-member of the Dancing Fools and 2005 Gold Medal (Second Place) International Dance Competition!

