

OLAQ

Volume 11 , Number 2

Special Double Issue: Thriving on Change...Embrace the Possibilities (Fall 2005) | Pages 6 - 7

July 2014

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Porter, T. (2014). Suddenly a New Library. *OLA Quarterly*, 11(2), 6-7. <http://dx.doi.org/10.7710/1093-7374.1082>

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OLA Quarterly is an official publication of the Oregon Library Association | ISSN 1093-7374 | <http://commons.pacificu.edu/olaq>

Suddenly a New Library

by Tobe Porter
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One day it just happens, “a Pooh moment” if you will, the library staff realizes there truly is no room for one more thing in the library. From this kernel of truth a larger library is born, but not until the need for a new library is understood and embraced by the community. It is not enough that the staff and governing body know the present library is too small. It’s not enough to tell the patrons about it. They really don’t care—it’s your workspace, your problem. As long as they can find the latest hot pick and have their questions answered, they are, ipso facto, happy with their little library. And if there is one thing all libraries, no matter the size, excel at, it is customer satisfaction.

So, how do you convince your community to embrace the possibilities that a new library will offer? The first step is to fill the library so full of programs that involve more and more people until they feel the need for more space. People then become convinced that their beloved little library will explode if a larger facility is not found. Pretty soon the entire community believes that more good stuff could happen if only there was more space. And if the staff and governing board do their work, what the patrons feel and believe will be absolutely true.

This is what happened in the small, unincorporated community of Langlois, and what is happening now in the slightly larger town of Port Orford. To pull in the hard-working Langlois ranchers who seldom visited the library but met over breakfast every morning at The Greasy Spoon, we asked the owner to cater an “architectural review” reception. The Port Orford fishers were happy to help raise funds by writing letters of support to the big corporations from whom they buy much of their expensive equipment. It is imperative to involve every aspect of the community in the new library project in some way.

Langlois and Port Orford are only a few miles apart, but as is often the case in Oregon, each is fiercely independent and determined to stay that way as each deals with the realities of a huge decline in the businesses that have defined their way of life forever: logging, fishing and ranching. I personally think (as an outsider) that it is this independence and tradition of hard work, coupled with their belief that a larger facility is truly needed, that is responsible for each community’s determination to build a new library.

I believe that the people who live in these small, no-destination-point areas greatly respect, and rally behind, anyone who is willing to take on a Herculean task, especially when their involvement makes a difference. Their support is, in fact, critical to the success of the project.

If you discount the stress, the emotional toll, the years of dedication and commitment, and just plain hard work, it is simple to build a new library once everyone agrees it is needed. Just:

- Foster community ownership by holding town meetings to elicit design input and other suggestions.
- Enthusiastically write often about every program and event and get it into the local paper.
- Put on creative local fund-raising activities.
- Write many grant proposals; and, most importantly,
- Keep the public informed about the project’s progress, both positive and negative.

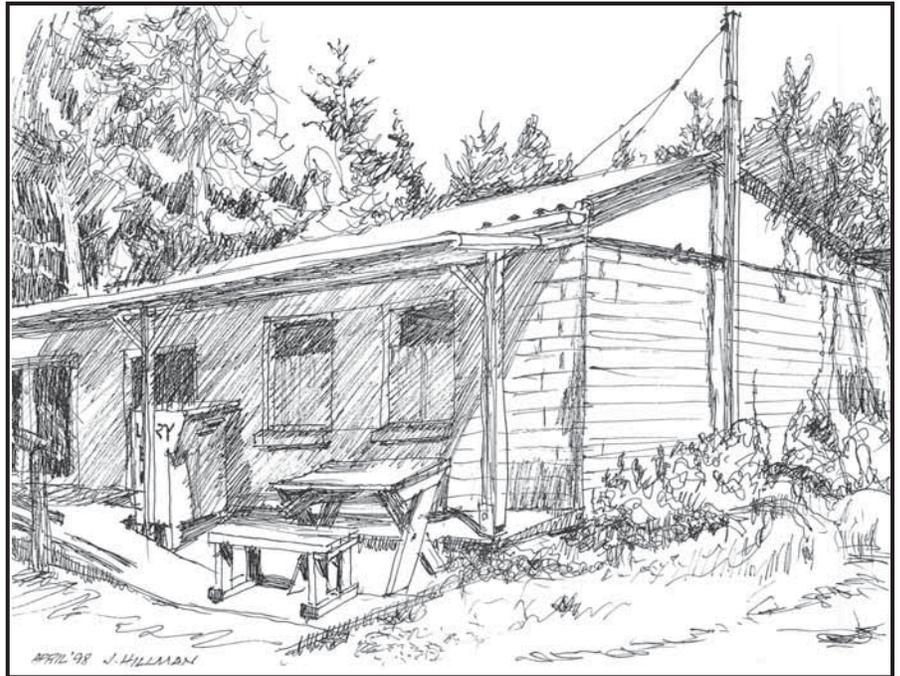
It took seven years to raise the money to build the Langlois Public Library. Dur-



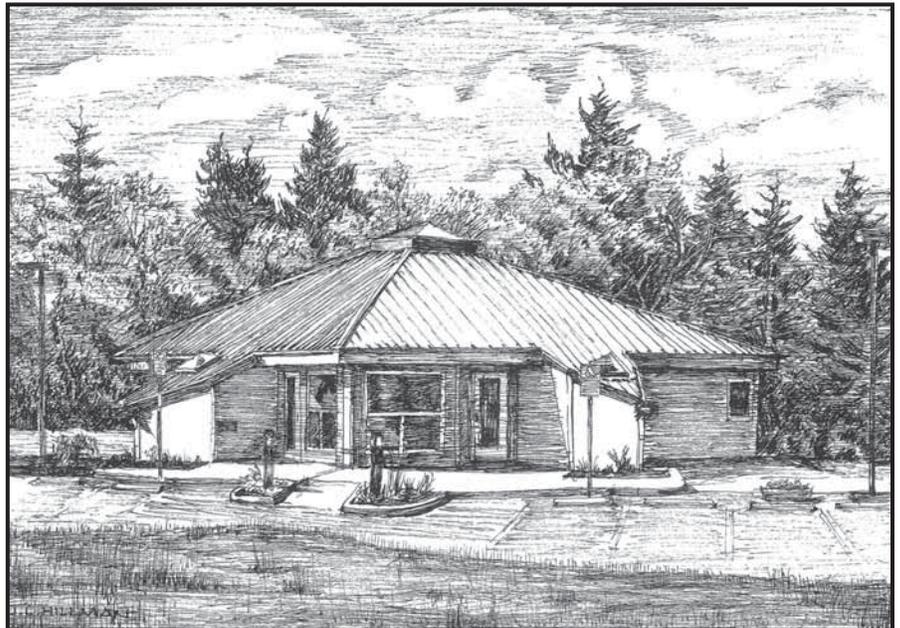
ing that time, the project suffered three major setbacks and many grant requests were denied. The community was kept informed about all of it. They were invited to feel the joys and the woes, the peaks and the valleys. For example, on May 28, 1997, these words appeared in the local paper: "We have the opportunity to apply for the only federal funds available for construction of public libraries. This grant could be as much as half the cost of the total project." On July 9, 1997, community members opened the newspaper and read: "Well, we didn't get the \$125,000 federal construction grant. It is certainly disappointing news, but it is not daunting. We will continue to raise money, we will build a bigger library, it will just take a little longer."

I think that is just the kind of challenge folks in small towns throughout Oregon like. "We will do it, it will just take longer." That's no big deal to people who fell the giants of the forests by hand, fish in 30 foot seas, and deliver lambs in 80 mph winds and hard-driving rain. They just dig deeper and work harder until one day that new library opens, and they know it belongs to them because they have met the challenge. 🌿

Tobe Porter was Director of the Langlois Public Library from 1992 to 2003 where she was the lead grant writer on the new library project. She is now Director of the Port Orford Public Library, spearheading the effort to raise over \$1.5 million to build their new library. She has had grant applications denied and granted, and she greatly prefers the latter. In her spare time, she is teaching grant writing workshops. Tobe can be reached at pol@harborside.com.



The old Langlois Public Library.



The new Langlois Public Library, April 2002.

