

Libraries' revival among state's top achievements

Volunteers reopen doors after tax district loses at polls

By Jim Moore
of the Daily Courier

It was called one of the greatest achievements in the past 20 years in Oregon by an esteemed panel of some of the state's most prominent people. "It" was the effort by hundreds of local volunteers to reopen the doors of the county's four libraries after voters defeated a ballot measure to form an independent library district in November 2006. Library supporters bounced back from their disappointment to band together and start a grassroots movement that culminated in the Grants Pass branch reopening in December 2008 and the

Williams, Wolf Creek and Cave Junction branches all opening again in 2009.

The community formed a nonprofit group called Josephine Community Libraries and raised nearly \$400,000 to combine with a \$300,000 matching grant from Josephine County.

Jennifer Roberts, an English instructor at Rogue Community College, experienced the sorrow of the defeat in 2006.

"The levy defeat was unbearably demoralizing," Roberts said. "I worried about whether I'd be able to raise my daughters in a community without a library, and I wondered about the effects of the

library closure on our economy—whether people and businesses would continue to move here without a library, one of the basics of civilization."

After the measure went down, all four branches in the county were closed in May 2007, and county commissioners diverted library funding to help pay for the financially strapped Josephine County Sheriff's Office.

All that remained was a reading room at the Wolf Creek branch that was open for just three hours one day a week. And that was only so the county wouldn't have to repay



ROBERTS

a \$300,000 state grant used to build it in 2008.

Daily Courier City Editor Kevin Widdison penned a column urging the community to take action. It was published on July 16, 2007. Ten days later, at a meeting organized by Widdison, citizens formed an all-volunteer "steering committee" that evolved into JCL.

The group followed a model used by the Public Broadcasting Service with a donor and patron structure to accept annual tax-deductible contributions for operations, and eventually raised enough money to receive the county grant.

Even though the library system once had an annual budget of \$1.9 million, JCL has been

doing the job with a budget of \$329,000, leaning heavily on volunteers.

Roberts, who was one of the hundreds of people involved with JCL, remembers the elation of seeing the doors swing open again.

"I felt that after the opening, our community could be proud of its library once again," she said. "Our library may not be the biggest or the richest, but I would argue that it's the best-loved. We're a community that loves its libraries so much we took matters into our own hands to open them again."

While Roberts remains an instructor at RCC, she is also a JCL board member and is the group's interim director.

"In thinking further about Josephine Community

Libraries, what strikes me is how special this group is," she said. "A diverse group of people came together and gave of their time, talents, and treasure for one common goal: to return libraries to Josephine County. We were brought together by a social cause, but we quickly became friends."

It was quite a social cause. "Libraries are special, and library advocacy brings out the best in people," Roberts said.

"We need libraries to fill our thirst for knowledge, cultural enrichment, and community."

Roberts also said JCL anticipates hiring a permanent executive director this spring. That person will be charged with overseeing the four libraries and raising enough money to ensure they never close again.



KEVIN LAUNIUS/Daily Courier

Grants Pass City Councilors Bill Kangas, Rob Pell, Mark Townes, Ward Warren and Lisa Berger (left to right with hands raised) vote to fire City Manager David Frasher in June 2009 at a special meeting in the Rogue Theatre. The same five councilors were recalled that September.

Quarrels over managers shatter peace at City Hall

By Jim Moore
of the Daily Courier

After decades of relative political calm, the world of Grants Pass city government turned tumultuous in 2004.

Entering 2004, the city had a manager who had been on the job since 1991, and during that time there were the normal ups and downs one might expect in local politics and government.

Since then, city government has had three managers, 26 councilors, five city attorneys and a recall that left the council without a quorum.

At the risk of oversimplifying, one can boil the controversies down to the firing of City Manager Bill Peterson in July 2005 and the attempted firing of City Manager David Frasher last summer. Five councilors, who were soon recalled, voted twice to fire Frasher, once by resolution and once by motion.

The resolution was vetoed, and last month the City Council approved a stipulation stating the City Council and mayor agree the council will not use a motion or an order to fire a manager hired by resolution. The stipulation also says Frasher's resignation overrode both council actions.

Details surrounding Peterson's situation are sketchy because most of the deliberation occurred in executive sessions.

What is known is that in the latter part of 2003 three councilors, Tim Cummings, Phil Paquin and Brian Thompson, gave Peterson across-the-board failing scores on his annual evaluation.

Following months of tension, the council voted in March 2004 to approve a 10-month contract with Peterson that officially ended on July 1, 2005.

The vote came after a lengthy executive session. Councilor Gary Berlant proposed the contract and Councilors Jeff Hyde, Mike Murphy, Kris Woodburn, Jack Patterson

Crisis in municipal government culminates in recall of 5 councilors

and Paquin voted for it. Cummings and Thompson were opposed.

Even though they voted for the contract, Murphy and Peterson later said it was the wrong thing to do.

A local group launched a recall effort against Cummings, Paquin and Thompson, but later called it off.

Meanwhile, Frasher's situation, for the most part, played out in full public view.

Controversy began shortly after a new council was seated in January 2009.

Ward Warren, Rob Pell and Mark Townes, three of the new councilors, were in the middle of the fray. They were eventually joined by Councilors Bill Kangas and Lisa Berger in voting to fire Frasher, and all five were recalled last September.

Friction was the norm almost immediately that January, and tensions escalated on Jan. 26 when Frasher, in a prepared statement, put "the governing body of the City of Grants Pass, and particularly Councilors Ward Warren and Rob Pell, on official notice that a malicious pattern of harassing behavior from Councilors Warren and Pell has created a hostile work environment for me and other employees of the City of Grants Pass."

Further, Frasher said that if Warren and Pell "do not cease and desist immediately, the next official communication from me on this matter will be through attorneys..."

Between then and June, when the five councilors voted to fire Frasher, conflicts and controversy abounded, with Councilor Richard Michelin, who also took office in January, often siding with the other five.

Murphy, who was elected mayor in November, also took his seat in January and again had a front row seat for the

City Hall turmoil. He vetoed the resolution to fire Frasher. Michelin was absent for the vote to fire Frasher, but sided with Cummings, who is still on the council, and Del Renfro in supporting Murphy's veto, meaning the resolution was overturned. Because the same five also passed a motion to fire Frasher, that launched a battle over which took precedence — the resolution or the motion.

When the new council took office, Woodburn was the city attorney. When he left at the end of January for a job with Evergreen Federal Bank, Assistant City Attorney Carl Sniffen took over.

But Sniffen didn't last long, and in April the city hired Paul Nolte as an interim until a full-time attorney could be hired.

He came onto the scene with more than three decades experience in municipal and government law, but he lasted less than a month. In his letter of resignation he stated: "This is simply not an environment in which I wish to practice. I do not believe it is conducive or constructive to good governance."

Enter Doug McGeary of Medford, who took the interim position the first of May.

Then on Aug. 6, the day after Frasher's final day, with no prior announcement, City Manager Pro Tem Laurel Samson announced she had negotiated a contract with the Medford-based firm of Hornecker, Cowling, Hassen and Heysell to provide city attorney services.

Mark Bartholomew of that firm has represented the city since then.

A group of citizens who supported Pell, Kangas, Berger, Warren and Townes launched their own recall campaign in July to oust Murphy, but later called off the effort.

Following the recall of Pell,

Kangas, Berger, Warren and Townes, the council was left without a quorum and, following the advice of Bartholomew, Murphy appointed Jennifer Wheatley, Jim Hitchcock, Dennis Webber, Jim Boston and Mark Gatlin to serve until a special election could be held.

On March 9, Kris Woodburn, Lily Morgan, Dan DeYoung, Rick Riker and Darin Fowler were elected to replace the appointed councilors.

Today, Samson is the city manager, Murphy is the mayor and Cummings, Renfro and Michelin are on the council with the five newly elected councilors.

Murphy, Cummings and Woodburn had been involved with both controversies.

They declined comment on the specifics of the events, but Murphy did note that "we have seen some turbulent times. That is true both in terms of the political climate and the national economic downturn, not to mention the growing pains we experienced during the period of rapid growth."

But he also said the city weathered those times, accomplished a lot along the way and is well positioned for the future.

"I can cite examples in transportation, job retention and creations, parks, down-

town, community celebrations, economic stability and planning accomplished during these challenging times," Murphy said. "And, as a community, our eyes are still on the horizon. I have no doubt that the best days for Grants Pass and its residents are still ahead of us."

Woodburn said, "It would be nice to put any previous conflicts behind us and move forward positively."

The seats of Riker and Fowler will be back on the ballot this November. In addition, the terms of Cummings and Renfro end this year and they have said they don't intend to run again.

So the City Council will soon have yet another new look.



Chet's... Your Community Garden Center

Chet's has been in business in Grants Pass since 1925. It was originally Star Feed Co. located on "G" Street where the Grants Pass Museum of Art and Gallery One are now. Slowly but surely plants and pets were introduced and the store eventually evolved into the garden center. The store moved to its current location on "H" St. in 1976. The building was originally the old Safeway store and covers half a city block. Changes continued over the years. The addition of the greenhouse allowed the store to carry plants year around. The pet shop was phased out in 2005 and The Flower Shop was added that same year. But through the changes one thing remained constant — customer service. Chet's has always been known for quality and service.

Cliff and Roxanne Bennett came into the business in 1994. They have been in the horticulture field since 1970, so the transition to owners of a garden center seemed natural. Moving to Grants Pass has been an incredible adventure for them and the garden center was a dream come true.

Customer service and expertise in their field along with their selection of unusual perennials and the "gardening atmosphere" are what set Chet's Garden Center apart from the others. Their customers run the gamut from beginner gardeners to the serious gardener and the staff takes time with everyone to fully answer questions and offer advice.

If you talk to Cliff, you will quickly learn that he loves his business and knows his stuff. "Roxanne and I are so proud to be part of downtown Grants Pass. Our flower baskets hanging up all over downtown have been our shining star. Our floral department is unique only to Chet's Garden Center. Our garden center is very different from our competitors' and that difference is why Chet's continues to thrive and prosper in today's market. Chet's is about quality products, customer service and beautiful surroundings for our customers," explained Cliff.

Chet's carries a large selection of statuary, garden plants, bamboo screens and fencing, pond supplies and of course gifts. Lots and lots of beautiful plants from annuals and perennials to roses and shrubs to stately trees. Come see what "grows on you!"



**Chet's
Garden Center**
5th & "H" St.
Downtown Grants Pass
541-476-4424

The Brewery Through The Years

Mrs. Keinlin with her parrots outside the Brewery.

On May 14, 1886, The Rogue River Courier announced that Grants Pass was to have a brewery, located where Front Street ("G" St.) crosses Gilbert Creek. The well produced a superior quality water that flowed artesian style, with a soft, sparkling display perfect for making high quality beer. A first-class brewer was hired, equipment was installed, and in 1887, a malt liquor license was issued to William Neurath & Co. The brewery was legally in business.

In 1892-93, for reasons which are not clear, the brewery ceased to function. From that time until 1902, the brewery building was used as an apple packing plant. In January, 1902, the entire frame building was destroyed by a fire which consumed all the wooden buildings on what is now "G" St. Mr. and Mrs. Keinlin began construction of a brick building on the same site and by the end of the year, the brewery was working once more.

In 1905, the brewery fell victim to "local option" when Josephine County residents voted to go dry. During prohibition, the brewery became a grocery store and bakery owned by Mrs. Keinlin. In the early 1930s the brewery was in operation again, finally closing in 1933.

In 1934 Robert C. and Grace Martin owned Martin Brothers Moving and Storage. Their business occupied a portion of the building and for furniture storage.

The building consists of three bays which currently are the bar, the restaurant and the banquet room. Over the years, each bay housed a variety of other businesses including an art gallery, upholstery shop, small engine repair shop and Caveman Second Hand Store.

Mr. Martin passed away in 1973, leaving the building to his daughter and son. A suggestion was made to demolish the building. However, in 1975, renovation began and in 1976 the Brewery opened for business as a restaurant.

Today, people still enjoy dining in this historic building which is located at 509 S.W. "G" Street. They are open Tuesday - Sunday for dinner from 4:30 p.m. Sunday brunch is served from 9:30 a.m. until 1:30 p.m. Call 541-479-9850 for reservations.

Mr. and Mrs. Keinlin constructed a brick building for the Brewery after the 1902 fire.

Mrs. Keinlin, seated, owner of the Brewery circa 1902

After the fire in 1902, only the smoke stack and brick portion of the brewery building remained.

Martin Bros. Moving and Storage occupied a portion of the Brewery building from the late 1960s until 1974.

The Brewery building as it looked circa 1974-75 just prior to renovation.

The Brewery Restaurant today.