

## Guest Opinions “Related” To Primary PSS Tax Measures

### January 28, 2014. Brady Adams. *Libraries a big part of a vital community* (Guest Opinion)

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#### BRADY ADAMS

When I was a kid growing up in Oregon, we didn't have much. My family worked hard, and we moved several times, all over the state. Every town we moved to had a library — a safe place for me to go as a kid. Libraries are the great leveler in our society; personal wealth and influence make no difference when you walk through those doors.

Nowadays, libraries offer more than just books. They are community hubs and technology centers. I hear a lot of people talk about how the Internet has replaced libraries. That might be true if you are talking about the libraries of the past — nothing more than a building with books. Our libraries provide technology and Internet access, giving the people of Josephine County access and opportunity to connect with each other, connect with the world, and expand their prospects. And, libraries have librarians to help you use the technology. You may have heard the saying, "The Internet can give you a million answers to your question, but a librarian will give you the right one." Libraries have changed, and I encourage people to visit the local library to see what's really going on.

What about people who don't own a computer or have Internet access? In 2004, the U.S. Chamber of Commerce joined the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation to endorse closing the digital divide by providing access to computers and the Internet at local libraries. In Josephine County, that's even more necessary today. According to a recent Pew study I read, about one-third of Americans still do not have access to the Internet. It's probably a higher number in Josephine County due to the lack of Internet providers in rural areas. Even if you can afford it, about 12,000 households in our community cannot receive access. I think about that, and wonder what it would have been like for me as a kid, moving all over and not being able to afford an Internet connection or a computer. Life is different now, and the Internet is essential to our daily lives, to do research, connect with family, learn new skills, and apply for jobs.

Libraries help build the foundation of productive economic development in a community. That's why I've decided to support a library district measure on the November 2014 ballot, and I encourage you to as well. We need a sustainable library system, with more hours and resources to serve families, especially those engaged in workforce training. Libraries are the most efficient way to maximize taxpayer return on investment — estimates from the Library Research Service verified that for every dollar spent on public libraries, taxpayers realized \$5 of value. I'm living proof of this fact. Libraries are part of the solution, and a wise Yes-vote for everyone in Josephine County.

Another suggestion I've heard recently is to charge for library cards. Some people believe libraries should be a fee-based service, with those that use it paying for services. Firstly, it's just not fair to the kids in our community whose families cannot afford to pay for books. I want those kids to have the same opportunities I did. Secondly, it doesn't pencil out. If we charge, we'd lose legal standing as a public library under Oregon law, and the additional funding that goes with it. Library staff tells me that equates to about \$150,000 annually, but it's actually more if you add promised state grants and the online services including the 30,000 or more eBooks that are part of a state consortium called Library2Go. We'd lose more money than we'd gain — penny wise and pound foolish.

The library staff and volunteers have raised an increasing amount of money with each passing year. According to a board report I read, over the last three years, they've increased the overall revenue by 24 percent. But the customer base has grown 100 percent in that same time with over 25,000 library cardholders. Although Josephine Community Libraries raises money for library operations through donations, private business sponsorships, and many grants, public demand for library services has increased beyond what these can support. I recognize that to continue providing basic library services, a stable source of revenue is required. We are so happy that people are using the libraries to improve their lives. Now let's take it to the next level with the stable funding that would be guaranteed by a library district.

In closing, I want to quote former U.S. Secretary of Education Lamar Alexander when he said, "If a child gets to kindergarten having never held a book ... there is probably nothing the education system can do for that child." I want all the children in our community to develop their minds and imaginations, and to get the support needed for lifelong learning. Reading opens up a window to the whole world, and the library is what helped me love reading. Anything you can imagine can happen when you are inside a library. Without libraries, I just wouldn't be the same person I am today.

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Brady Adams is former president of Evergreen Federal Bank and a former Oregon state senator. He is also honorary chairman of the group Keep Our Libraries Open.