

Newspaper column

Latah County Library District

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### Improving Our Latah County Libraries

Logan Lake and London Fog are two of the new paint colors at our Genesee library. The library, one of seven in the Latah County system, was repainted and had new flooring installed over the past weekend. This project was over two years in development and involved discussions with the City of Genesee, the Friends of the Library, the U of I Department of Architecture and Interior Design, and the Genesee Parks and Recreation District. And, of course, our library staff and Board of Trustees. Involving a community and its leaders is how we work to ensure our libraries continue to fit our communities' needs.

Public libraries take different approaches to improving their facilities. Everyone can agree that public library service as we currently know it includes a building. A place to have books and other library "stuff" as well as library people. But who owns the building and who is responsible for what aspect of it varies.

In Latah County six of our seven libraries are owned by the city they are located in. In each case the city and the District have a lease agreement outlining responsibilities. The city may take care of the roof and heater, for example, while the District takes care of the collections and staffing. The Potlatch library is the exception to the city-owned model because it was built through grant funds with ownership stipulations.

So what happens when someone feels a library needs a new shelving arrangement? Or a meeting room? In Latah County ideas like this germinate in a variety of places—anywhere people who value libraries start imagining it better. How a particular idea grows often depends on its scope—i.e., replacing shelving is more straightforward than adding a room.

In the case of the Genesee library, it was a newly hired staff member who kicked the project off as she considered ways to make the space more effective. Ideas were filtered through several resources, including Shauna Corry at the U of I who has generously made her expertise available on several of our recent projects.

Funding for these projects is usually a negotiation. As with any landlord/tenant relationship, it begins with a review of the lease and discussions between the two main parties. In Genesee the city had already replaced old windows that were losing heat and provided a new safety light for the entrance. For the repainting and new laminate flooring, the Friends of the Genesee Library, the Library District, and the Genesee Library Gifts and Memorial fund divided the costs. This kind of partnership has been the norm over the past several years. It makes it easier for everyone to say yes and increases the odds for success.

Our libraries benefit from turn-taking in a different sense as well. Since we have a modest budget for facilities improvements, as well as a modest amount of staff time to spare from regular duties, we take turns with projects. Last year it was the Deary library that benefited from a facelift, the year before it was Potlatch that got attention. Currently the Troy Friends of the Library are considering improvements. The District can't afford a number of simultaneous projects, but has usually been able take on one moderate facilities project a year.

And these usually turn out pretty wonderful for the community. Few things have the immediate impact of a new paint job or new carpet. These projects also help our libraries adapt to changing needs. The Library District trustees now have their planning committee looking at each of our facilities through the lens of our 2011 strategic plan and it's exciting to think of the improvements this group might help make possible. For now, we invite you to visit and enjoy the new colors and comfort in Genesee.