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The Special Library Levy: Untapped Source of Additional Funding

What Is the Special Library Levy?

The special library levy (also called the 27-cent levy) is a potential source of additional funding for public libraries allowed by Iowa Code section 384.12 (21). Currently, out of 947 Iowa cities only 79 or 8% have the special library levy, although the odds of passing it are very good. In 2009, out of four cities that voted on the levy, three, or 75%, passed it.

If all Iowa cities passed the levy at the full 27 cents per \$1,000 assessed property value, it would generate over \$19.7 million in funding for Iowa libraries.

The Iowa Code allows cities (including cities without their own public library) to levy an additional tax of up to \$0.27 per \$1,000 assessed property valuation for support of a public library. There is a petition and referendum required to pass the levy. The levy question may be put on the ballot in regular city elections, held in odd numbered years. The next opportunity to have it on the ballot is November 2011, followed by 2013, 2015 and so forth.

Before a decision is made to pursue the levy, find out if your city is at the \$8.10 property tax limit. Approximately 80% of Iowa cities are at the limit and cannot levy more taxes for the General Fund. Assuming your city is at this limit, next discuss with your board the feasibility of passing a levy. For example, if your community has just passed a school bond issue, the timing may not be right to pursue the special library levy.

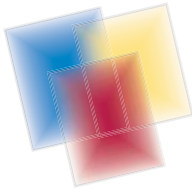
How Will the Levy Benefit the Community?

If a decision is made to pursue the levy, discuss with your board what more the library could do for the community if it had additional funding. Does the community need...

- more library hours?
- a wider range of up-to-date books and other resources?
- more special services for children and teens?
- programs for adults?
- up-to-date computers and other technology?
- a handicapped accessible building?
- a community room?

Be ready with an answer when a community member asks, "What would the library do with the additional money?"

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Steps in Pursuing the Levy

1. Share information about the levy and its benefits with your library board.
2. Inform key city officials such as the mayor, city council and/or city administrator. A selling point is that the decision is in the hands of the voters – they decide if they want to tax themselves a little more to support the public library.
3. Consult the city attorney.
4. Ask the county auditor about deadlines for getting it on the ballot.
5. Discuss the referendum wording with the board - would the community support a levy with no ending date or would it be more likely to pass it if it were in effect for five years, 10 years, etc. If you decide to have an ending date, be aware of the timeline for renewing the levy. The levy question may be put on the ballot in regular city elections, held in odd numbered years. For example, if your levy ends June 30, 2014, you would need to have the question of renewing the levy on the ballot in 2013. If you miss that deadline, you would have to wait until 2015 and your library would be without levy funding for two years.
6. Work on the petition making sure the wording is identical to the language that will be on the ballot. [Please see the end of the article regarding a 2007 Attorney General's opinion about wording the special library levy question.]
7. Discuss who will start and collect the petition (be aware of ethics issues). The petition is valid if signed by 10% of eligible voters in the last regular city election, but not less than 10 persons. The petition may not be signed by rural residents.
8. Present the signed petition to the City Council.
9. Ask the City Council and City Administrator to forward the petition to the County Auditor for inclusion on the ballot
10. Notify the State Library after the election about the outcome.

One Library's Experience

New Hampton Public Library Director Pat Ipsen highly recommends forming a citizen committee made up of people who use the library regularly. An important advantage is that a group of informed citizens will have an investment in seeing that the funds generated from the levy are in addition to any other money the city spends on the library.

In New Hampton, which passed the levy in 2005, the citizen committee met first with the mayor and city clerk and later the city council to inform them of their plans. They obtained signatures on the petitions and planned the publicity which included a brochure and posters. Members asked people to write letters to the editor, had a story in the newspaper and sent brochures through the church bulletins and to teachers. They spoke to organizations such as the Rotary, sororities and senior citizens. They did a neighborhood brochure drop right before the election and sent postcards to people who had signed the petition to remind them to vote.

Cautions about the Levy

Ethics: In pursuing the levy, it is important to be aware of ethics issues. Iowa Code 68A.505 prohibits the use of public funds for any political purpose, including the express advocacy of a ballot issue. "Public money" includes direct or indirect expenditure of funds by a governmental body, the use of any property, resource, or equipment owned by the governmental body, and use of staff time during regular working hours. In addition, once a group of people have raised more than \$750 or spent more than \$750 in a calendar year for the purpose of supporting (or opposing) the levy, the group must file the Statement of Organization as a committee.

The following actions can be done without violating ethics:

- Library board passing a resolution or proclamation in support of the levy
- Library staff active in and even leading the campaign if it is on their own time
- Board members speaking to community groups

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- Library staff speaking to community groups outside of work time
- Asking the library Friends group for help

Wording: A 2007 Attorney General's opinion about the special library levy cautioned that a petition including language that attempts to limit use of revenue from the levy would likely be rejected by an Iowa court. It was reasoned that the "expenditure of tax revenue generated to support the library is determined and controlled by the governing body of the library – the board of trustees. If the voters approve a supplemental library tax levy to be used to support the public library, then the trustees can appropriate the funds for any lawful use to support the library." This opinion should not be read as calling into question the validity of previous levies that directed use of revenue from the levy.

More information about the special library levy, including what the levy would generate per city, sample petition and ethics brochure from the Iowa Ethics and Campaign Disclosure Board are available on the State Library's Web site. See <http://www.statelibraryofia.org/ld/funding-info/sp-levy>. Contact Sandy Dixon, Program Director for Library Development at the State Library, if you have questions. (800-248-4483; 515-281-4328; sandy.dixon@lib.state.ia.us)



Notes from State Librarian Mary Wegner

Thanks to Iowa public librarians for promptly completing your annual survey! By providing these statistics, you make it possible for us to tell the Iowa library story – and it's a compelling tale. Use of Iowa public libraries continues to increase.

- The percentage of Iowans who hold active public library cards has gone up to 68.2%. **More than two-thirds of all Iowans are public library card holders.**
- Circulation is up about 2.5% over the previous year, with more than 29 million items checked out in FY10. That's **almost 10 items checked out per Iowan** per year.
- Visits to Iowa public libraries went up almost 5% in the past year, with public libraries recording more than 19.5 million visits. That means that **every day** more than 54,000 people walk through the doors of Iowa public libraries!

More details about Iowa public library statistics for FY10 will be released in early spring.



All of us at the State Library send our warmest wishes to all of you for a joyous holiday season and a healthy, fulfilling new year.





Krob named State Data Center Coordinator



Gary Krob has taken over the duties of Beth Henning as coordinator of the State Data Center. Henning retired in June.

Krob graduated from Iowa State University with a degree in journalism and a minor in English. He worked in *The Des Moines Register's* library digitally archiving articles and photographs. He was also employed as a librarian at the Iowa Correctional Institution for Women before coming to the State Data Center in 2001.

Krob is currently working on updating the data center's Web site with new software that will allow users to select specific areas and specific data items.

Users will be able to see the data graphically using maps and charts. The project was made possible through a grant from the IOWAccess Project and has been in development for a year and a half. Krob said the site will go live in early 2011.



State Library provides shelving to Department for the Blind

Following the decision to close the State Library's medical library, the medical books and journals were made available to state agencies and libraries. But the empty shelves were donated to the Department for the Blind and Physically Handicapped (DBPH) to hold the thousands of audio cassettes they had previously stored in the basement of the State Library. The entire collection of cassettes and shelving was moved to the new Iowa Building across the street from the Ola Babcock Miller Building, home of the State Library - Main Library.

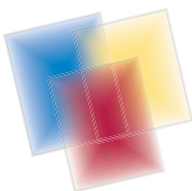
State Library staffer Tom Keyser, who helped with the move, figured that if the DBPH had to buy new shelving, it would have cost them more than \$80,000.

"The State Library was pleased to be able to help the department by providing the shelving they needed," said State Librarian Mary Wegner. "Working together, we were able to save the department, as well as the state of Iowa, a good sum of money."

"The shelves are a tremendous gift to the circulation department of the library and to all the individuals who use the DBPH throughout the state," said Randy Landgrebe, interim director of the library. "I don't know how we would have managed the storage of these valuable materials without the book shelves."



Some of the shelving from the medical library is ready to be moved to the Iowa Building



Certification Update

Congratulations to the following public library staff certified for the first time through the [State Library's Iowa Certification Program for Public Librarians](#).

Nancy Beach - Stratford
Beth Burgin - Centerville
Roderick Buttermore - Grimes
Annette Bramstedt - Hudson
Susan Deaton - Cedar Falls
Diane Erickson - Stratford
Valerie Karczewski - Lake Park
P.J. McBride - Zearing

Maryann Mori - Waukee
Sherri Peterson - Newell
Sara Scheib - Pella
Sarah Scholten - Des Moines
Susan Shaw - Thompson
Susan Stanton - Knoxville
Penny Tilden - Rolfe
Brenda Van Wert - Hampton
Kathy Zylstra - Sully



State Library staff visit newly renovated Mason City Library



Pictured front from left, Mason City Public Library Board Chair Kay Sloan, State Librarian Mary Wegner with Marie Harms and Jay Peterson, State Library, and Mason City Public Library Director Mary Markwalter.

State Library staff visited the newly renovated Mason City Public Library on October 1.

"I was so pleased that the State Library staff could attend our preview tour. It was very exciting for us to have guests," said library director Mary Markwalter.

The Library opened to the public on Oct. 21, 2010. More than 1,300 visitors were on hand the first day and checkouts totaled more than 1,800.

"We have experienced increased attendance and circulation since opening," said Markwalter. "We have to empty book-drops three times a day now because our circulation has increased so much. We have hosted a series of special events for all ages to celebrate the opening and have enjoyed huge attendance at them."



State Library staffer finds way to recycle 3,000 lbs of microfilm cassettes

They were going in the dumpster and eventually the landfill, but Tim Skeers, State Library cataloger, found a way to recycle 8,000 microfilm cassettes containing silver halide film.

According to Skeers, the microfilm needed a particular reader which broke some time ago and couldn't be replaced. The patents documents on the microfilm are now available on CDs, DVDs and online.

"Recycling microforms has come up on the Government Documents mail list from time to time as depositories often need to get rid of large quantities," said Skeers. "But no one ever seemed to come up with a satisfactory answer so I started searching on Google."

Silver halide film can be recovered and refined back to pure silver, Skeers explained. Eventually he found a company in Mexico, MO and sent them samples for silver-content analysis. Skeers said they told him it was worth enough that they would pay to ship the cassettes to Missouri.

"We're proud of Tim for taking the time to find a way to keep these items out of our landfills," said State Librarian Mary Wegner. "His initiative and determination are admirable."

Skeers mentioned that there's an interesting video of a person cutting apart sterling silver flatware and explaining how it is valued. It can be found at <http://www.archenterprises.com/>.

News from around the state

Fayette library helping unemployed with computer lab

Fayette Community Library Director Linda Adams is one of many Iowa librarians helping the jobless in Iowa. Adams said she was approached first by an unemployed person and later by the student services manager from New Horizons Computer Learning Center to provide space and equipment for computer-related training for displaced workers. Plant closures and employee cutbacks in Fayette County and the surrounding areas have left hundreds of people without jobs or the skills to acquire new employment, said Adams.

"The training at the library provides hands-on instruction in a variety of computer programs, especially common workplace programs such as Microsoft Office 2007," said Adams.

The library is where people come to do their homework for the Microsoft class they are taking at New Horizons. The goal is to assist area residents update their skills to secure future employment and self sufficiency.



Some of the students from the Fayette area work on their homework at the library

Ottumwa library director retires

After working for the Ottumwa Public Library for 27 years - 10 as director- and leading the library through a \$400,000 renovation, Mary Ann Lemon has retired. In an *Ottumwa Courier* article, Lemon is quoted as saying that one of her major challenges was working with a building that was 100 years old.

"When I started out, the most technology we had in the building was a copy machine and microfilm," Lemon said. "It's just been really rewarding to be able to make this library a beautiful, updated building."



Kelly's Corner dedicated to youth in Mechanicsville



Kelly's Corner

When Kelly Eby, assistant director of the Mechanicsville Public Library, died suddenly at age 46 last December, it made perfect sense to the library staff to create "Kelly's Corner." Kelly was instrumental in promoting Teen Read Night, along with story hours and summer reading programs for all ages.

"She was loved and respected by everyone in the community, especially the young people," said library director Judy Hartman.

Hartman said that with the help and encouragement of Kelly's family, donations came from all over the United States. Kelly's Corner includes shelves for books, a desk and a laptop computer, a television, a Wii gaming system and an Xbox game. Volunteers from the community helped design, build and paint the facility.

Davenport Public Library Eastern Ave. Branch wins construction award

Midwest Construction magazine announced its "Best of 2010" winners for construction and design excellence on September 20, honoring Davenport Public Library's Eastern Avenue Branch with a Cultural Award of Merit.

Library director LaWanda Roudebush said, "To receive a regional award for the design and construction of the Eastern Avenue Branch Library is very gratifying. Everyone who worked on the project was dedicated to making our LEED-certified building a model for the community and now with this award, we are known to the whole region." An independent jury of industry experts evaluated 175 construction projects on safety, innovation, contribution to the community or industry, construction quality and craftsmanship, and function and aesthetic quality of design. Only 58 projects were given awards.

Projects were eligible for the competition if they were 1) located in Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Ohio or Wisconsin; 2) completed in the past year; 3) did not have a construction-related fatality.

Winners of *Midwest Construction's* Best of 2010 will be entered into the National Best of 2010 competition and judged against winners from other regions. The winner will be announced December 14th at an Awards Ceremony in Chicago.

Columbus Junction Public Library partners with development center and IWD

People in Columbus Junction now have a fast track to Iowa Workforce Development services thanks to funding and technical support proved by a Strengthen Rural Iowa (SRI) grant. The Columbus Junction Community Development Center was one of several community-based rural non-profits in 14 counties in Southeast Iowa to receive SRI funding for capacity building in 2010.

One of the initiatives undertaken in Columbus Junction as a result of the grant was the development of an Iowa Career Access Point (ICAP). The ICAP program was developed to provide guided remote access into the Iowa Workforce Development One-Stop system. In the case of Columbus Junction, the nearest Iowa Workforce Development Center is over half an hour away so there was a clear opportunity to serve the community better.

Nitza Lopez-Castillo, co-director of the Community Development Center in Columbus Junction, took the lead on the project. A computer and printer were purchased to give users private access to the system. To provide an ample schedule and a solid roster of trained volunteers, the Community Development Center partnered with the Columbus Junction Public Library. Lopez-Castillo, Columbus Junction Public Library Director Cathy Crawford and library staff participated in a "train the trainer" session with Iowa Workforce Development. Library staff learned how to navigate the ICAP Web site and all it has to offer.

Once the training was completed signs were put up in the Civic Center and the process of helping residents to become familiar with or make better use of Iowa Workforce Development resources was underway. A half dozen people a week are making use of the service, using it to file for unemployment benefits, prepare resumes, search for jobs and to submit job applications. Lopez-Castillo and Crawford agree that it is a good fit for their organizations as they try to meet the needs of community members and that the partnership they formed is better than either office offering the ICAP service on their own.



Johnston PL celebrates 1,000,000th visitor

The Johnston Public Library's 1,000,000th library visitor was on his way to Wee Read storytime when the streamers and confetti were thrown on October 6. Weston Danner, age two, accompanied by his brother Jordan, seven months, arrived via stroller courtesy of their grandmother, Deb Culp. All three are Johnston residents.

Nearly 300 predictions were made for the day and time that the milestone would occur. Bill Jensen of Des Moines came the closest to the correct answer. His prediction was October 6 at 10:30 a.m. Weston, in the front seat of the stroller, actually arrived at 10:41 a.m.

The Friends of the Johnston Public Library sponsored the celebration. Cookies were provided throughout the day for all library visitors, and both Weston and Bill received their own copy of the book, *One Million Things: A Visual Encyclopedia*, courtesy of the Friends.

Seated: Jordan and Weston Danner. Standing from left: Friends of the Johnston Public Library Denise Zoss, Lisa Cooper, Denise Bubeck; Deb Culp; and library director Willona Graham Goers.



Congratulations to Iowa's Star libraries



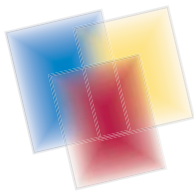
Iowa now has 11 Star libraries based on four statistical measures from *The Library Journal* Index of Public Library Service 2010. Receiving four out of the five star status are the Albert City Public Library, James Kennedy Public Library (Dyersville), Huxley Public Library, and Bancroft Public Library.

Public libraries in Sheldon, Zearing, Sioux Rapids, Stratford, Pomeroy, Winthrop and Hubbard all received three star status.

The four statistical measures used in the index include library visits, circulation, program attendance and public Internet computer use.

According to *The Library Journal*, "Library statistics show stakeholders that what our libraries deliver to our communities has always mattered, but they may now be more important than ever. In the face of the ongoing broad cuts libraries are seeing nationwide, it is vital to illustrate the accomplishments of libraries."

This round of *The Library Journal* Index rated 7,407 public libraries nationwide and identified 258 star libraries.



Creativity abounds at Manson Public Library



Ann Schalpkohl, director of the Manson Public Library, and staff created a unique Christmas tree using books for the city's Christmas Tree Decorating contest.

"We've had great comments on it," said Schalpkohl. "It's great public relations and the best part is that after Christmas we can take it apart, put the paper jackets back on the books and return them to the sale cart."

Schalpkohl got the idea from *Real Simple* magazine and plans to keep it so they recreate the tree next year.

It was a record breaker for the State Library's donations to the Toys for Tots program.

Carol Simmons, secretary to State Librarian Mary Wegner, is responsible for the annual Toys for Tots drive at the State Library. She's thrilled with staff response this year.

Said Simmons in a message to staff this morning, "The 2010 Toys-for-Tots Campaign far exceeded my expectations this year. We have collected 71 toys which comes out to 2.73 items per person. I applaud all of you and can't thank you enough. I'm very proud to be part of the State Library staff."

State Library staff gives generously this Christmas



Jay Peterson, who brought in the first toy, and Carol Simmons