

Jackson County has rave reviews for library operators

By Howard Huntington
of the Daily Courier

ROGUE RIVER — Officials and citizens had almost nothing but praise in interviews about the job Library Systems and Services has done running the local library and 14 others in the Jackson County system.

"We couldn't be more pleased. They've met and exceeded all the aspects of our contract," says county Commissioner Dennis "C.W." Smith.

"They are very creative with their personnel and all the employees seem to be very happy," Smith says. "While the hours are limited, we are almost where we were" before all 15 libraries closed in April 2007 for lack of funds.

The county hired Library Systems and Services (LSSI, for short) to reopen the libraries six months later on a much-reduced budget of about \$3.5 million annually.

"Overall, I think it has been a very positive thing," says Commissioner Dave Gilmour, noting that library employees — all of whom now work for LSSI — apparently were satisfied enough to pass up a chance to unionize.

"There's no reason to not extend the contract" with LSSI, which expires in September 2012, he says. But the commissioner doesn't foresee the county paying to expand library hours in the coming year.

Although the federal government has restored payments that once supported the libraries, the county is intent on building reserves of more than \$100 million. The interest earned, combined with property taxes, would be enough to sustain all county services indefinitely,

without raising taxes, Gilmour says.

LSSI "seems to be working out very well in our neck of the woods," reports Sandy Henderson, outgoing president of Friends of the Library for the Rogue River branch at 412 E. Main St.

Only because of fundraising by Friends is the branch open Saturdays from noon to 4 p.m., in addition to county-funded weekday hours. Other towns also have rallied to help LSSI expand services.

"I've just not heard any negative comments," Henderson said, "and I'm there maybe a couple of hours each day" at the Rogue River branch.

Kendra Baldo vino, secretary-treasurer for Friends, also gives LSSI good grades. "The only thing I don't like about it is that the access to the library is so sporadic now" that hours per week have shrunk from 38 before the closure to 28.

"Some days, it's open in the morning. Some days, it's open in the afternoon. You really have to think about when you go to the library," she says, adding it has been difficult to raise the money for Saturday hours — about \$11,000 annually.

The new president of Friends, Heather Simonett, says she also is hearing good things from patrons.

The Rogue River library now has just five paid employees, including Manager Seline Pierson, who was laid off in 1991 after two years with Josephine County's library in Williams, and again in 2007 after eight years at Jackson County's Central Point library.

With Josephine libraries also closed down last year, Jackson feared Josephine residents would swamp its libraries and



A 15-year veteran in libraries, Seline Pierson manages the Rogue River branch after enduring layoffs in 1991 in Josephine County and in 2007 in Jackson County.



HOWARD HUNTINGTON/Daily Courier

Jessica Shriver of Grants Pass and her daughters, Hannah, 5, and Sarah, 2, enjoy a book at the Rogue River library. Jackson County shut down all 15 of its libraries last year for lack of money, then reopened them six months later under contract with Library Systems and Services.

decided to issue library cards only to people who live in Jackson County, own property there or are students at Rogue Community College.

Other Jackson services, such as children's storytimes and rental of conference rooms, remain open to everyone. And now that Josephine is starting to reopen its libraries — under a private nonprofit organization, Jackson may reconsider its limit on library cards, Pierson says.

Carol Webb enjoys her job as a "foster grandparent" at the Rogue River library. After story-time Friday, "I must have had six or seven little girls over here. We were making Christmas chains, coloring, and the boys were all over there playing their blocks and things," says Webb, who has 11 grandchildren and 12 great-grandchildren of her own.

Darrell Curtis of Gold Hill was cut off when the library closed last year. "I don't have Internet access at home, so I came here frequently." Now, he's able to resume his cyber-job search and keep up with his e-mail.

Here's the book on RR library

A few particulars about location, hours and services at Jackson County's Rogue River library:

- Address: 412 E. Main St.
- Hours: Monday 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Tuesday 1 to 7 p.m. Thursday 1 to 7 p.m. (closed this Thursday, New Year's Day). Friday 10 a.m. to 7 p.m. Saturday noon to 4 p.m.
- Phone number 864-8850.
- Online information: www.jcls.org
- Services: Checkout of books, DVDs and other items by Jackson County residents or property owners, or students at Rogue Community College. Library cards are free. Access to books from other

- libraries nationwide. \$5 fee.
- Children's storytimes every Friday at 10:30 a.m.
- Summer reading programs for children.
- Internet access.
- Foster grandparent program.
- Includes a small stipend.
- Conference rooms for rent at low cost.
- Reference services.
- Most services are available to non-Jackson County residents.
- Books on sale during library hours at the adjoining Friends of the Library store.
- Volunteering: Help is always needed to sort and reshelve books, etc. Call the main number.
- Donations to Friends of Library. Call Sandy Henderson at 582-4300.

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■ The Smokefree Workplace Law bans smoking in most public places with an enclosed area that are open to the public. These include break rooms, bars and taverns, bingo and bowling centers, private and fraternal organizations, restaurants, offices, retail and wholesale businesses, manufacturers, truck stops, care facilities, indoor entertainment places, work vehicles operated by more than one employee and hotels or motels, although as many as 25 percent of rooms may be designated as smoking. Penalties are \$500 per day, up to \$2,000 in 30 days. For information, see the Oregon Public Health Web site, www.oregon.gov/dhs/ph. Call toll-free (866) 621-6107 to file a complaint.

■ Communities must offer a place to recycle electronics, as they may contain toxic substances such as lead and mercury. As many as seven televisions, computers and computer monitors may be dropped off for free at one time. The bill doesn't apply to other electronics, appliances or components such as keyboards, speakers, printers and scanners. Locations in Grants Pass include Southern Oregon Sanitation, 1381 Redwood Ave.; Josephine County

Transfer Station, 1749 Merlin Road; and Goodwill, 742 S.W. Sixth St. For information, see the Department of Environmental Quality Web site, www.oregon.gov/deq or call Oregon E-Cycles toll-free at (888) 532-9253.

■ Gas stations are not to "top off" tanks, adding extra fuel beyond when sensors indicate it is full. The Environmental Quality Commission approved the change to reduce spread of pollutants, including carcinogenic benzene. For more information, see the state Air Quality Web site, www.deq.state.or.us/aq/toxics or call the DEQ at (800) 452-4011 and ask for William Knight.

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