

WLA Advocacy Messages

- 1) Across the nation, we're seeing cuts to library budgets at the city, county and state levels. These cuts are resulting in reductions in the number of staff, hours of operation, and branch and library closures.

But more importantly, they are negatively impacting the ability of residents to access the information and resources they need. Libraries have long been leaders in cooperative operational agreements -- sharing collections and delivery services. Long before it was fashionable to trim budget excess and eliminate duplication of services, libraries were leading the way.

We hope Wisconsin communities don't experience the kinds of drastic cuts that have been reported nationwide, but sitting and hoping is not a course of action we can risk. To avoid drastic library cuts here in Wisconsin, we need you to speak up for your library in particular, and for libraries in general. Over the next few months, we'll share information that you can use to voice support for libraries. Here's our first message, and we hope you'll take a moment to call your state legislators and decision-makers in your community to tell them why you support library service.

Many municipal, county, and state services compete for funding each year, and one of the messages we hear frequently is that "essential community services" need to be funded before everything else.

We believe that the public library is an "essential" service and should be adequately funded. While the circulation of books, DVDs, and audio CDs are still important aspects of modern library service (circulation is up substantially), libraries and librarians are very involved every day helping residents prepare resumes, search for jobs, and submit online job applications.

High-speed Internet access is one of the most popular services offered by today's public libraries, and it's vital to be able to use many e-government sites to download forms and instructions, or to enhance one's education through online courses and tutorials.

State budget funds allocated for library spending amount to about 0.2% of the state budget. About 2% to 3% of statewide municipal spending (all city, village, town and county spending) is allocated for libraries. Figures vary by community, but it's certain that libraries receive a small portion of local budgets.

It's vital that we ensure these "essential" services are available for all residents, and we can only do that if people like you become involved and speak up for your library! This week, find out when candidate forums are being held in your area and make plans to attend.

- 2) Over the next few weeks we'll share information with you about the important work libraries do and the community value they provide. Before we do, consider the ways you can speak up for your library.

We've seen in other states the power of the public voice when it comes to libraries, so lending your voice in support of libraries is critical. In numerous cases, public input has either stopped drastic cuts in library funding, or helped reinstate funds that were already cut. You can:

- Attend candidate forums or debates;

- When candidates come to your house or call, ask them if they support libraries;
- Write/call/email elected officials (city council/mayor, county board, state legislators/governor) and urge adequate funding for libraries because they are vital community services;
- Write a "Letter to the Editor";
- Attend the Wisconsin Library Association's Library Legislative Day on Feb. 22, 2011 (www.wla.lib.wi.us/legis/day/) Your mere presence sends a powerful message at the Capital.
- Speak up locally and talk to friends and acquaintances about the library, and how vital its services and resources are. Spread the good news about how busy libraries are, but how much they need local support to ensure they get adequate funding.
- Get several "Speak Up For Your Library" cards from your library and ask some friends to join the cause;
- Ask at your library how you can offer your support; and
- Tell your library story at www.librariesforreallife.org.

How you "speak up" is not as important as the act of speaking up. Libraries need your voice now, more than ever! It's not too late to help ensure that Wisconsin libraries continue their proud heritage of progressive service to residents. Make sure libraries can continue to promote ideals like the self-education and personal improvement of residents, and don't instead suffer the same fate as libraries in other states.

Libraries just make good financial sense. Numerous studies—including one commissioned in Wisconsin by the Department of Public Instruction—show that public libraries provide \$4 of economic return for every \$1 invested. Those numbers shouldn't be ignored when we look for fuel to power society's economic engine. Libraries also provide valuable resources and services to the business community, helping them to be as efficient and productive as possible.

Use the information we'll provide over the next several weeks to help send a message about the vital role the public library plays in your community. This week, call your legislator (and candidates) and local elected officials to tell them that you support the library as a service that's essential to your quality of life.

- 3) We're asking you to Speak Up for Your Library because libraries are an important way we connect with the rest of the world:

Internet access and related services are some of the library's most used features. In fact, in 2009, there were more than 1.8 million uses of public Internet computers in the seven-county area served by the South Central Library System (Adams, Columbia, Dane, Green, Portage, Sauk & Wood Counties). Nationwide, nearly half of library users use the Internet when they visit – even though most of those visitors also have Internet service at work, school or home.

Not only are more and more people using the 762 public Internet computers available at SCLS member libraries, they're using them for tasks like accessing job and career training information from the Wisconsin Department of Workforce Development's online job centers, and applying for financial aid for education, small business and personal loans, and grants. More and more of these types of resources are only available online, and librarians have stepped in to help guide library users to the important information and tools they need.

This emerging role has been particularly important during the past two years, and it has heightened awareness of the important role the public library plays.

Libraries are changing lives every day, but they can only continue to perform their important work if people like you become involved and speak up for your library! This week, let the governor (and candidates) know how important libraries are to you, your family, and your community. Speak up for your library, before it's too late!

- 4) We're asking you to Speak Up for Your Library because libraries use tax dollars efficiently, working together to reduce duplication of services and resources.

A prime example of this is LINKcat, which gives library users across the system ready access to the holdings of most SCLS member libraries. Libraries are able to purchase fewer items because their patrons can obtain them from other libraries.

Another example is BadgerLink, which brings to Wisconsin residents a "treasure trove" of online resources (or online databases) that can meet almost any information need.

These resources, which can be used by consumers, business people, students, and educators—anyone who has an information need—cost the state about \$3.5 million in 2009. It is estimated that if libraries purchased these resources separately, the cost would exceed \$66 million.

Throughout Wisconsin, most libraries also participate in cooperative purchasing of resources not available in BadgerLink, again saving more than if each individual library purchased on their own.

Efforts like these help ensure that public libraries maximize their funding resources to deliver the best possible service. Public libraries are a great example of your tax dollars coming back to benefit you, at the time of your choosing. Public funding for libraries is one of the things that sets us apart as a society.

To make sure your library is able to continue providing the services you value, become involved and speak up for your library! This week, write a letter to the editor and explain that libraries are vital community services that deserve adequate funding.

- 5) We're asking you to Speak Up for Your Library because libraries help us manage the information explosion!

The amount of information available to humans today is expanding faster than ever before. In fact, the numbers are so large they're mind-boggling. Keeping up with all that information is impossible, but keeping up with some of it is very important.

The Internet is the result of much of this information explosion, but its mere existence doesn't mean it's easy to use or reliable. So a response is required when people say "Why do we need libraries when we have the Internet?"

The Internet has been referred to as a giant library, one where all the books are just scattered on the floor. The information is there, but how do you access it in a timely and reliable manner. The quick answer is librarians! They are trained information professionals who know how to find the really reliable information, and do it quickly.

Not only can they help you find the information you need, and help you learn how to find it in the future, they also have access to a treasure trove of special resources often referred to as "online databases." In fact, residents have access to many online databases right from home,

and learning to use them can make you information rich.

You hire an electrician when you need wiring done, or plumber when you need your pipes fixed. Why not turn to a librarian when you need to find important information?

Librarians are one of the great values at public libraries, and we need you to become involved and speak up for your library—and your librarian! This week, talk to two or three friends and acquaintances about the library, and how vital its services and resources are. Give them a “Speak Up For Your Library” card (from your library) and encourage them to fill it in and return it to their library. Encourage them to get a library card if they don’t already have one.

- 6) We’re asking you to Speak Up for Your Library because libraries are busier than ever and deserve everyone’s support:

Libraries are dynamic information environments that bear little resemblance to what many of us remember as children. Libraries are also busier than ever, contrary to what many people believe.

Total circulation in all South Central Library System libraries was nearly 13.5 million in 2009, up from about 12.8 million in 2008. That’s an increase of nearly 5.5 percent, and that’s on top of continual growth over the past 10 years.

In 2009 there were more than 6.7 million library visits at all SCLS member libraries, compared to about 6.3 million in 2008.

Statewide, more than 65 million items were circulated by Wisconsin’s public libraries in 2009. Wisconsin ranks 8th per capita in circulation nationally—but just 24th in per capita public library collection expenditures!

Libraries are busier than ever, continuing an upward trend that began more than 10 years ago, but staffing and funding levels are relatively flat. Over the past 5 years, public library visits have increased by more than 10 percent and circulation increased by more than 15 percent, yet staffing has increased less than 1 percent! Libraries have done more with less for years, but given recent trends in circulation and library visits it’s not a scenario that can continue.

Libraries are a great investment in our local communities, but the quality of their future is in doubt. You can make a difference if you become involved and speak up for your library! This week, write a letter to our U.S. Senators (and candidates) and U.S. Representatives (and candidates) and voice your support for library funding at the national level.

- 7) We’re asking you to Speak Up for Your Library because despite being busier than ever, libraries know how to stretch a buck!

In these difficult economic times we’ve heard a lot about the need for “belt tightening” and the elimination of “duplication of service.” Libraries have been belt-tightening and improving efficiency for years. They’ve also created efficiencies through cooperative purchasing arrangements through their regional public library systems, operation of a shared online library catalog, and a delivery system that makes it all work. But now they’re having to consider options like reducing staff and the purchase of materials, as well as scaling back the number of hours and days they are open, all of which results in a reduction of service for residents.

The South Central Library System uses state allocated funds to: support the LINKcat shared

library catalog; offset delivery costs to libraries; provide a comprehensive continuing education program at no cost to librarians or libraries; give technology support; provide building design consultation and graphic arts services free of charge; and provide many other consultative services at no cost.

Doing more with less is what library systems and their member libraries (including your local public library) are all about, providing the best possible service with the resources available. Continued reductions in funding will only further impact these numbers, and further reduce the service levels local public libraries are able to provide.

To ensure that libraries are able to continue meeting resident needs into the future, lend your voice to the effort and speak up for your library! This week, visit your library and ask what you can do to "speak up."

- 8) We're asking you to Speak Up for Your Library because libraries support the development of basic literacy skills among young children and adults who can't read or write, and they provide service to those who have special needs:

Each year thousands of children participate in the Summer Library Program (30,388 In 2009), which resulted in community value of nearly \$33.4 million across the South Central Library System. Research shows that children who read as few as two books over the summer vacation maintain the reading proficiency they achieved at the end of the school year. The value of communities is realized because in the fall teachers can pick up where they left off instead of re-covering reading material. All education is based on the ability to read, so the impact of the Summer Reading Program on learning is immense.

Libraries also support many literacy and education programs for adults and non-traditional students, allowing them to master important basic skills that open doors to education and employment.

Not only do libraries provide services and resources to those who can easily come to the library, we have a rich history of providing services to residents who can't use traditional library services or for whom library services are not easy to access.

Consider Newsline for the Blind, a statewide program that makes the content of some Wisconsin daily newspapers available to those who cannot see to read. They can simply call the state-funded service and listen to audio recordings of the articles. Libraries also provide many other services like large-print books and audio books, all perfect for those who have trouble seeing.

The Talking Book and Braille Library also provides library materials to individuals with vision problems throughout the state, through interlibrary loan.

In addition, libraries pay attention to the diverse needs within their communities and respond with appropriate programs and resources to meet those needs.

Through services such as these, libraries open a world of information and education to those who might otherwise have to go without. Speak Up for Libraries—they speak up for everyone. This week, make plans to attend the Wisconsin Library Association's Library Legislative Day (www.wla.lib.wi.us/legis/day) on Feb. 22, 2011. Your mere presence sends a powerful message at the State Capitol.