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*Library Director Michael Gaston presents the Library's current challenges and opportunities.*

There have been remarkable improvements in the quantity, quality, and variety of services provided by the Deschutes Public Library since the Library District was formed in late 1998. The adequate, stable funding local residents provided by supporting the establishment of a countywide library district, has enabled the library staff to remain focused upon upgrading library services. The Oregon State Library now considers Deschutes one of the top public library programs in Oregon.

The District Board and I are proud that the only unfulfilled campaign promise from 1998 is the construction of the new Sisters Library, which will be completed within the next year. With the fulfillment of these commitments, the Library District can now focus on the following four priorities:

1. Maintain and enhance the quality of library service while library usage continues to increase at a rapid rate.
2. Provide WEB access to library services using the latest technology.
3. Increase services to teens, with a special focus upon supplementing the school libraries which have been devastated by the current school funding crisis.
4. Establish one or more branch libraries to serve the growing population in east Bend and in the area between Bend and Redmond.

The Library District is being challenged by its own success. Doubling library usage has had an impact, both in terms of clerical functions as well as reference services. Over the next year, you will notice that the District will move to provide express stations where patrons can check-out their own materials. This has already been tested in Redmond, where more than 80% of the books are now checked out on self-check machines. The Express Stations will free staff to handle incoming materials as well as provide assistance to patrons looking for information.

If you haven't taken a look at the Library's WEB site, I would recommend that you take the time to explore the many services that are available online. You can now search full-text magazine articles or submit reference questions from your home. There are also electronic reference tools on our WEB site. We will be updating our catalog searching features over the next year. One exciting feature on the horizon will be the ability to request that you be alerted whenever a title by your favorite author or on a selected topic is added to the catalog.

Perhaps the most ambitious initiatives to be undertaken over the next five years will be the introduction of public library circulation stations in area schools. The concept is to build upon the existing staff in school libraries, providing training to use the public library electronic resources and online catalog. Material will be delivered to the schools for check-out by the staff of the school media center. This labor-intensive service will be tested over the next two years with three area schools. Additional schools will be added to the service as resources allow. This program has the potential of serving over 25,000 students in the 38 public school libraries in Deschutes County.

Planning has just begun on establishing one or more additional branch libraries to serve the growing populations in east Bend. The Library will spend the next year mapping demographics in order to identify likely locations. This will be an exciting project which we hope to see completed within five years.

The Library has a number of challenges and opportunities ahead. While we are very proud of the accomplishments that were achieved over the past five years, we are just as excited about the future.