

Lane County Historical Museum TRT Talk, October 11th, 2012, Lane Workforce Partnership

Task Force Members and Guests:

Lane County is responsible for a museum facility and all that it contains-- the various document, photographic, and artifact collections that are county property. That responsibility includes maintaining the county's oldest building, the Lane County Clerk's Building.

Since 1996 the county museum operation has been contracted to a non-profit. My name is Bob Hart, executive director of that non-profit, the Lane County Historical Society. **The trust and rental agreements executed implicitly recognized that the Society could operate the Museum more inexpensively than the county could.** The terms were simple. In return for maintaining and expanding Lane County's historical collections and operating the museum, 10% of the TRT funds were directed to the Society ***because without those funds the Society could not afford to maintain the collection or operate the Museum.***

So the Lane County Historical Society is performing a task that saves the county money. By giving the Society the designated museum-related TRT funds, the county meets its obligations **and gets more bang for its buck** than if the funds were dispersed.

- In 1996 the museum was open 22 hours/wk; LCHS is operating at 31 hours/wk
- **We have an outstanding record of procuring grants and have generated over \$75,000 over the past 5 years for collection-related projects that the county would not have been eligible for.**
 - digitizing photographs
 - documenting pioneer quilts as part of a larger statewide project
 - arresting mold and deterioration of a pioneer scribed tree trunk

Since 2008 the Museum has suffered 30% cuts to the TRT subsidy and now receives only 70% of the formerly agreed upon amount resulting in scaled back operations. **If the subsidy is cut further, the continued operation of the Museum and the maintenance of the collection by the Society may become unsustainable. This question needs to be asked- if the Society was not performing this job, who else would do it?**

The Society has done an exemplary job operating the county facility and providing a much-needed public service with heritage education. Here's why:

Tourism

Surveys indicate that 26% of our visitors are tourists.

- We advertise in Travel Lane County tourism publications, and at both TLC locations w/brochures and rack cards
- are active in MUSE (Museums of Springfield and Eugene), our local museum cooperative
- active in Oregon Museums Association –included in online museum directory

Q: Why do museum visitors, both tourist and local, come?

A: For a variety of reasons:

Museums have the real stuff (authenticity and the quality of the collections)!

- Our Reed covered wagon, dating to 1850 is the oldest, most pristine covered wagon in the state
- 31,000+ historical photographs that can be viewed and searched online through our distinctive website

10/8/2012

- 250 annual formal research requests are fielded by the library and archives staff
 - 25% from researchers outside the county
 - 124 museum manuscripts listed in the Library of Congress database

The Museum has a national audience

- The recent letter from grass-roots historian Bagley, who in his latest Oregon Trail book, has cited the museum 14 times!
- We have at least six pages of photographs in the Time-Life Old West series volume on The Women
- Six color photographs in Oregon Trail quilt expert Mary Bywater Cross's volume, Treasures in the Trunk

Heritage Education

- The decline in social studies instruction in our schools increases the value of historical museum resources
- Partnership with the Assistance League of Eugene for school field trips
- The museum as a higher education laboratory- interns, hands-on museum studies class meetings and projects.
- Community outreach:
 - McKenzie River Bicentennial support- advice, personnel, and funds
 - Oct 17 master of ceremonies duties for Eugene 150 at the Skinner Cabin
 - Professional and technical advice on preservation and conservation for smaller historical museums throughout the county—Communities with museums benefitting recently include: Creswell, Cottage Grove, Junction City and Florence.
 - Our photographs are used regularly by city and county government, university students, businesses and authors-
 - The RG's special Eugene 150 supplement
 - A beautiful photomural on the s. side of the Oregon Office Building

Relocation

There seems no question that the museum can be a bigger tourism draw. Witness the public buzz generated by potentially relocating to the downtown Eugene US Post Office building

- Foot traffic potential - greater than tucked away at the Fairgrounds.
- Positive public response; ***everyone seems to get it!***

To consider reducing the TRT subsidy at this time, when any move would be to a larger facility, would seem both ill-considered as well as ill-timed. The task force should actually consider restoring the full 10% allocation so that the museum can better fulfill its educational mission for both Lane County residents **and** tourists.

