

# First Friday<sup>TM</sup> Opinions And Editorials

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## Save My Library

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A public/private non-profit partnership

**T**here are turning points in this lifetime when you must step forward and take action. This is one of those times. A community with no public library is not nearly *good* enough for the citizens of Josephine County. This issue of *First Friday* is all about what can be done – and who will do it.

First, a little reality. Many promising options from the past have been exhumed – and declared dead. *No one* is going to come running to our rescue. Federal funding to re-open our libraries: No. State taxes to re-fill our pocketbooks: No. Some non-profit from out-of-state to perform library miracles for us: A Big No. We're on our own.

Shortly after the libraries closed, Dale Matthews of *First Friday* met with Jon Wacker, a former library board member, to discuss some new ideas about library management and funding.

A subsequent interview with County Commissioner Dave Toler revealed that he had been thinking along the same lines. It seems Kevin Widdison of the *Daily Courier* had the same general idea, because, just before the printing of this issue of *First Friday*, he wrote an editorial which resulted in a community meeting.

This first general meeting to consider new ideas for running libraries was a mixed success. Some did not want to hear *any* new ideas regarding the system. Others were clearly *upset* that so many people attended.

The libraries are currently closed, so one plan is to expand the Steering Committee to include a wider variety of citizens and perhaps a bit of new thinking.

Some are absolutely opposed to this. And one of the participants felt a newcomer was guilty of *not* honoring her. She said 3 times: "I wanted to jump across the room and strangle you!" The hope is that energies such as this can be redirected.

Dale Matthews of *First Friday* wrote the Steering Committee:

From the conversations I've heard and participated in, it seems we make up two broad points-of-view. There are members of our group who feel strongly that "three or four months" of Steering Committee meetings will be "just fine, because there's no hurry."

I pointed out that "We'll lose a lot of people who were at the general meeting if we delay like that for months."

The answer was "They can leave. We don't need them."

I disagree. Plus, I think we're a Steering Committee, not a Parallel Parking Committee.

The local non-profit charity Interschool Television (iTV) could possibly be chosen as the center around which the new library organization is formed.

"iTV is willing to step aside from the decision-making side of the library project and concentrate on making sure that we stay legal in everything we do. If we take up iTV's offer, the Steering Committee will suggest our actions, the general meeting will decide by voting, and the entire process will be triple-checked by everyone."

It's not at all decided, but for the moment, the majority is in favor of new ideas - and open books.

# A public/private non-profit partnership

## County Commissioner Dave Toler and *First Friday* Editor Dale Matthews Discuss Plans to Re-open the Library

Dave Toler: No one until you, Dale, at *First Friday* has even given me a call or an e-mail and said “Hey, what can we do about opening our library?”

First Friday: You and I have spoken at length about a plan. Want to share that thinking?

Toler: OK, uh, the concept is basically one of a partnership between Josephine County and a non-profit 501(c)(3) charity.

I have received concurrence from my other two board members, after the May levy, that we would put up \$300 thousand in seed money, uh, matching seed money, for a non-profit charity to match that \$300 thousand through fundraising and, uh, open up our libraries and operate our library branches.

Friday: How long would the \$300 thousand have to last? A few years? Forever?

Toler: It is seed money, so it is a one-time thing. Whether it would, whether the County would be able to provide, uh, similar amounts of money in following years, Dale, I must admit there is no absolute certainty to that. I would certainly advocate for it.

Obviously, if we got no more federal money and found no other revenues, uh, next year, that probably would be very tough to renew. But, assuming that we will get renewal of the federal county payments, which Wyden is very confident that we will in some way, I would be advocating for renewal.

Unfortunately, given the, uh, complete unpredictability of where the government is right now, and our, ah, ability to get revenue to replace it, renewal certainly isn't guaranteed.

At this point, \$300 thousand is available for matching. And I have a commitment from the other County Commissioners.

Toler: So the concept would be modeled after public radio or PBS, ah, public television. It would be a non-profit charity that would have members and the dues would be somewhere along the lines of \$8 to \$10 a month – or about \$100 a year.

And, for that \$8 a month, the membership would be assured that there continues to be a library system for everyone in Josephine County.

I think it runs out to about 8% of households that would have to belong to this in order to raise their matching \$300 thousand. And of course that's assuming that nearly all of those are basic membership

Friday: The non-profit charity provides half the funding, primarily through membership.

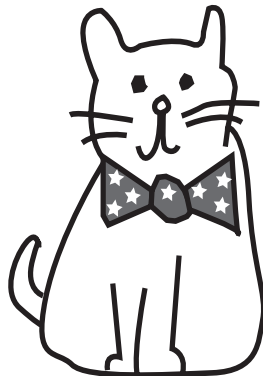
Toler: Yeah, there would be other opportunities for grants, for equipment, for materials, for books. Y'know, you would be, the avenues would be all open, I think, for the capital expenditures and equipment and materials. I think there would be funds available, especially for a new venture like that, especially as a non-profit. I think it could do quite well. So \$300 thousand would just be for operations, then grant money could help pay for some of the other things, especially in the first few years.

Friday: You know that grants generally aren't available for people's salaries, for example.

Toler: Yeah, it's pretty tough. You can get public grants. And, uh, government grants will do that. They're usually very temporal in nature, three to five years at the most. So, even with public grants, the problem is they're just not sustainable to run operations, not solely on grants. You can do it for a while, to get started. So this model, which I'm sure you're familiar with, is just like, uh, public radio and public television membership.

Friday: Our local charity iTV is very familiar with that concept.

**My Cat Jack Says: Can this be done? I don't mean can it be done just about anywhere of course it can. I mean, can it be done in Josephine County? Our reputation for clear and honest plans sharing is pretty dark. In fact, it would be a major victory for open government if the books for this new production are actually open to the public. Just imagine what a huge impact it would have on the Bad Old Boys and their controls if we could show that just one project could operate completely in the open, freely sharing its plans and all its income and expenditures! Watch for opposition to this idea. Can we really drag it all...into the sunshine?**



# Re-form our libraries as a membership organization?

Josephine County Commissioner Dave Toler says: “It’s been proven that if you get enough people who care and want to make *sure* it’s there, they will join and pay membership dues to keep it going.”

First Friday: Most important – everyone can continue to use the library, even if they’re not personally paying to sustain it.

Dave Toler: Yes, this is proven very successful in public radio and public television. The concept is that people really will join, even though they don’t have to, as sustaining members.

Even though they can benefit, if they can turn their radio on or turn their TV on and enjoy the programs without paying, it’s been proven that if you get enough people who care and want to make *sure* it’s there, they will join and pay membership dues to keep it going.

And I think that, uh, a library would fit really well with that, because it’s a similar kind of service. I think at least 8% of people in our community will say, “I want to support that. I believe that we need to have a library in our community.” And they’ll say that for two reasons: “I want to take advantage of it personally,” y’know. But also you get ones who join because they just simply believe that “every community should at least have a library.”

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**First Friday:**  
**How about the initial privilege of picking up a hammer and a mop to help your membership library instead of being invited to some ...champagne brunch?**

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Friday: The non-profit charity provides half the funding, primarily through membership. Think that 8% membership is too ambitious?

Toler: Let’s see, there’s 30 something thousand households in Josephine County. So, uh, y’know, you take 8% of that, that’s over 3,000 households. Well, at \$100 a year, obviously that’s, uh, more than the \$300 thousand the non-profit needs to raise in matching funds.

Friday: So basic membership would cost 8 dollars a month.

Toler: That assumes just the basic membership, Dale. How many of those would pay for a higher level membership just to make sure a library is there?

Friday: Some people would be donating, say, \$500 to \$1,000. Do you suggest a difference in membership benefits?

Toler: Oh, y’know um, my experience in doing this, Dale, is probably not much. Um, those who do, ah, they’re not doing it for the extra product, they’re doing it because they support, uh, whatever it is, whether it’s public radio or public television or the library. I have seen where 10 to 20% of your members are higher level members.

Friday: The reason I’m asking is that, in some parts of the country, in Washington D.C. for example, there are those who want to support the work of the Smithsonian. Then there are members of high society who give and are invited to special champagne brunches.

Toler: Yeah.

Friday: That’s nice. It’s a little elitist.

Toler: (laughs) Y’know Dale, that’s really important to a lot of people. That’s one of the benefits of membership.

Toler: If you’re a higher level member, one of your benefits might be that you are invited to special events, speakers, or something. Some libraries do that. If you’re a higher-level member, you get to come and have maybe dinner or lunch with the speaker.

Yeah, you’re right, in a sense they are elite in that they’re giving more money to the organization to make sure that it continues to operate. And so they get treated a little special on occasion.

But as far as checking out materials and using them, they’re just like anybody else that uses the library.

If some of them, as is the case with public radio and public television, there are some higher-level members who maybe don’t even really use the facility that much. But they just really believe that it ought to be there, they’re going to put the money down every year to make sure that they have library, to make sure that the kids, that the children of our community, have a library.

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**Commissioner Toler:**  
**There’s 30 something thousand households in Josephine County. 8% [of that equals] over 3,000 households ... at \$100 a year, [it’s] more than the \$300 thousand the non-profit needs to raise in matching funds.**

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Y’know I’ve talked to people since they’ve closed down. Y’know, the idea that our kids don’t have libraries, the idea that some of our seniors, low-income seniors, who depend on libraries because they can’t go out and buy books every week, that’s important to some of these people who have more ability to pay and will likely join at a higher membership level.

Friday: My personal preference is that if you’re going to be part of an “elite” group, then how about the initial *privilege* of picking up a hammer and a mop to help your membership library instead of being invited to some special champagne brunch?

Toler: (laughs) There ya go.

# The Goal: Support Our Own Libraries

First Friday: I don't want to throw a monkey wrench into our plan here, but it's important to consider all the possibilities, especially if there are things we haven't taken into account.

We can rely on \$300 thousand in matching funds from the county for the first year. What if, in the subsequent years, everything goes wrong and we don't get more funding from the federal government? Um, do you believe that the county would then be able to put in a certain *base* amount? I mean, what's the worst-case scenario? Zero dollars in the second year?

Dave Toler: I would say that probably *would* be the worst-case scenario. In other words, and that really is a worst-case scenario, Dale, if next year we get zero federal dollars and we haven't been able to come up with, ah, y'know replacement or near replacement of those dollars, that could very well mean zero dollars for this partnership. I admit that.

That's the worst-case scenario. I would say, given Senator Wyden's confidence, uh, it's actually a fairly slim chance that that's going to occur. I don't know. It depends on which Commissioner you're talking to (laughs).

Toler: I think we need to face the music here in Josephine County. We've got to put our chin up and say, "Y'know, we can do this ourselves. We don't need, uh, to be at Washington D.C.'s mercy." We don't need to sit and wait until we know what *they're* gonna do. I think it's time that we start facing it. We can take care of ourselves. We need these services and we have the ability and the talent. I just think it's time for us to realize that and move on, y'know. I think re-opening the libraries would be a first great example of that, to say, "Hey, here's how we figure it out on our own. We're not looking for help from outside, we can do it ourselves."

Friday: It's all very exciting. What's our next step, Dave?

Toler: That's a good question. Maybe *First Friday* is the next step. I, I have hope that maybe this article here will enliven the discussion and I'm hoping that you're gonna say how to get involved. And, y'know, I would certainly be there, and I would answer any telephone call and e-mail. You know I certainly would. I know that Dwight Ellis also is very open to seeing this happen so, um, I certainly am glad to play a facilitator role in making this happen. So, I'm hoping this *First Friday* article will start something. We might ignite something here, Dale.

Friday: Alright, here is what we'll do on *our* part. We will come up with a new website, a phone message system, and an e-mail address. We'll put that in the article: IWillHelp@SaveMyLibrary.com and everyone who's interested can send an e-mail. We'll suggest a first meeting [since done by Kevin Widdison of the *Daily Courier*] so everybody can go over details about this public/private partnership idea.

We can use an organizational umbrella and fill its board of advisors [since offered by the officers of local charity iTV] with lots of people who are committed to new, positive directions for the community.

Toler: Yeah, that sounds great Dale. I'm looking forward to it, I really am. I want to help make this happen.

Friday: Good. It's time that we get our libraries open again. And if it means having to look at things in a different way, and do a little out-of-the-box thinking, I say it's about time.

Toler: Hallelujah, alright!

Friday: Our good example may help solve *other* problems we have in the county. An open, self-sustaining partnership may inspire *more* innovative thinking.

Toler: There ya go. Alright Dale. Well, thank you.

**My Cat Jack Says: What's at stake here? Oh, just our entire way of doing business. Here's an example:**



**Local government is paid by Charter Cable based on the number of local subscribers. OK, what's that number? "We don't know." Have you ever asked them? "No, we haven't" Do 'subscriptions' include Internet? "Dunno." But that's a lot of money! "We're not sure we even want to ask that question." Uh-huh. Old Boys, you better fight an OPEN library!**

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