Notes from Mosier: The Road to Sustainability

Scott Alan Smith
Midwest Library Service, smith@midwestls.com

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I’ve been writing about the libraries in Curry County, Oregon, and what I believe are the steps (the first steps, at least) to ensuring their survival. These decisions are primarily political, but as is the case with so many things in life, politics play an integral part in successful library management. To frame the specifics of Curry’s circumstances I’m first going to outline the general political climate in southwestern Oregon and northern California.

Curry and Jackson counties in southern Oregon, and Del Norte and Siskiyou in northern California, are remote from their respective state capitols, and all share a deep distrust of state governments and major population centers. At one point there was a fanciful movement to secede from both states and form the State of Jefferson. Even within each county there’s a strong libertarian and divisive view of the world; within Curry, suggestions of cooperative systems: when confronted with stark budget realities (as Curry is; the county is essentially bankrupt) library funding is an easy target. But what the long-term sustainability of the community’s library might look like. As I have said before, it’s not the individual, it’s the institution.

The second reason was Midwest. I’ve known Jay, and Midwest, for over thirty years. This was simply an opportunity I could not pass up. In a vendor world described on the one end by Amazon (I won’t even get started) and the big-box vendors on the other, Midwest survives (and thrives) as a vendor with feet in two worlds: the old-school values of genuine service and personal attention (when you call you get a real person, not an automated switchboard telling you to consider in a very visceral way what the future, and what the long-term sustainability of the libraries in Curry County, the first step in creating a county-wide system.

Another development that I hope will play into the future success of Curry libraries is the dissolution of the five independent districts to the north Curry district, the first step in creating a county-wide system.

And, for those of you who may not have thought about it, this year’s Acquisitions Institute at Timberline Lodge is coming up in May — check us out at www.acquisitions institute.org.

Timberline Lodge