

New tax money a win for library

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WATSONVILLE — If you can read this sentence, chances are you have benefited from a library.

Possibly with that in mind, citizens in Santa Cruz County decided last November to increase funding for their public libraries. County voters overwhelmingly passed Measure B, which — after the half-cent earthquake-relief sales tax expires in March — adds a quarter-cent sales tax specifically for public library funding.

The additional revenue will allow local public libraries to offer greater access, more services, and a larger space to library users in Watsonville and around Santa Cruz County, library officials said.

"Tremendous impact," Deborah Barrow, director of the Watsonville Public Library, said about the new sales tax. "We're very excited about what we'll be able to do."

Barrow and the Watsonville library should be able to do a lot. Revenue generated by Measure B is expected to be more than \$5 million annually over the 12-year life of Measure B. The Watsonville library system would see about \$1 million



Tarmo Hannula

Deborah Barrow, director of the Watsonville Public Library, said the new library tax will nearly double the library's budget.

of that — more than doubling its annual budget to \$1.8 million.

The Santa Cruz City-County Public Libraries system is expecting about a \$4.1 million revenue increase. Its budget is currently about \$4.6 million.

With a greater income, the Watsonville Public Library intends to enhance its computer system, to provide Internet access, to operate longer hours, and to create more space to separate quiet study and group study, Barrow said.

Plans are for Watsonville's system to expand its book collection from 103,000 to 142,000. It wants to double its space at the main downtown library to 32,800 square feet, allowing for group study areas, quiet study areas, a computer skills center, literacy programming and meeting rooms.

Also planned is a 5,000 to 6,000 square foot library to be built in the city's northeastern area, to serve as

the permanent home for the Freedom Library now housed in a portable building on the campus of Freedom School.

For the Santa Cruz Libraries — there are nine altogether — it's not only a case of making additions to the current system, but also getting back what it once had.

"Our top priority is getting our hours — which were cut when our funding was cut in '92 and '93 — restored," said Director of Libraries Anne Turner.

Now evening hours do not exist at many branches of the county library system. As well, no branch other than the central library in Santa Cruz is open on Sunday.

In addition to longer hours, the county will strive to provide outreach programs to children and senior citizens and replace its automated cataloging system, Turner said.

"These automation systems are supposed to be replaced every five years," she said. "We've had ours for six."

Although the new tax does not go into effect until July 1, the Watsonville Library took out a \$35,000 advance from the city to get a head start on its improvements.

"The first thing we wanted to do was begin our Sunday hours right away," Barrow said.

The advance will also go toward hiring an additional staff member at the Freedom branch and begin payment to an architect for future building.

"We need to start doing some preliminary planning," Barrow said.

To celebrate its new Sunday hours, there will be an open house from 12 to 5 p.m. this Sunday at the Watsonville Library. The event will be sponsored and paid for by the Friends of the Watsonville Library. Guests will be welcomed by Mayor Al Alcala and entertained by juggler Tyas Frantz, guitarist Rafael Manriquez and magician Genie Houdini.

Greater library access is one way to address many of the problems confronting today's youth, said Lani J. Imperio, president of Friends of Watsonville Library.

"The library is one of the few places children can go and feel safe," he said. "But you go there during a Monday, Tuesday, or Wednesday during peak times, and the place is packed. We need more room."

"Education is the way to go. That's how libraries should be used," he said.

REFERENCE