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A BOOKWORM'S VIEW

A library is a wonderful thing

Mrs. Lawrence was admittedly not a teacher.

Yet in fourth grade, she taught me a lesson that has enriched my life — that a library is a wonderful place.

It was in the 1950s and baby boomers were flooding schools. There was a severe teacher shortage, and the regular fourth grade teacher was unable to assume her duties at the beginning of the school year.

So Mrs. Lawrence, who seemed more like a kindly aunt, would preside over the classroom.

She was eager to get through the obligatory matters so she could enjoy reading to us. After she had read most of a "Dr. Dolittle" book, I went up after class to tell her how much I liked the story, and she said the magic words: "They have more of these books at the library."

I soon entered the Kent Branch of the Toledo Public Library system in the Old West End, and was amazed to see all the books, many tons more than Grandma Ruth had on her extensive bookshelves.

My first library card was one of the best presents of my entire life.

A driver's license was years away, but oh, the places I could go with that library card.

And there were libraries everywhere I went.

On passing through Coldwater for the first time, I found the beautiful Clarke library. In the future were libraries in Green Bay and Madison and the Clarke greeted me upon my return from Wisconsin.

Librarians were everywhere, always willing to be helpful.

Those who staff Branch County libraries are public servants, and I am reminded of visiting a high school friend sometime toward the end of the 1960s. We sat, along with his younger brother,



ROLAND STOY

discussing the sorry state of the world.

What could we do?

I said I would become a teacher; the brother said he would become a minister, which he did. I was derailed into journalism in Green Bay years later. My friend had said he was going to become a librarian, and he recently retired after 30 years with the Toledo-Lucas County Public Library.

Lives are saved and protected by first-responders and law enforcement, but teaching, journalism and the ministry can also be noble professions. My friend served his community as well with his chosen field, through which lives are enriched.

Of course, even as libraries evolve, it is all about books for me, and I am reminded of former Branch District Library Director Mary Hutchins.

As she was retiring near the end of the last millennium, she knew of my discomfort with computers coming into "my" library.

She said, "Now Roland, we will still have books."

Happily, they do, along with much, much more.

There is something for every one of the 21,000 library card holders in this county, and something for every one of the other 21,000 or so Branch County inhabitants, should they take advantage.

Let the library be there for them. Visit branchdistrictlibrary.org to learn more, and vote for the millage Aug. 5.

Roland Stoy is a former Daily Reporter staff writer. He retired in January 2013.

Coldwater *Daily Reporter*, July 22, 2014, page A4**YOUR VIEWS****Check the back of the ballot**

To the Editor:

An investment opportunity for Branch County voters appears on the BACK of the Aug. 5 ballot.

The Branch District Library Board asks voters to approve a half mill for eight years for operating expenses. A yes vote is an agreement to pay 50 cents for each \$1,000 of taxable property value. Thus, the owner of a home worth \$100,000 and taxed at a \$50,000 value agrees to pay \$25 more per year for library services at all six branches of the District Library: Algansee Township, Bronson, Coldwater, Quincy, Sherwood Village, and Union City.

The District Library is a fully-integrated and consolidated public library system. The 20,000-plus people with Branch District Library cards get books, audiobooks, electronic books, movies, music and access to language, ancestry and multiple other databases at all six locations, plus everything in the Woodland's Library Cooperative covering most of southern Michigan and everything in the Michigan Electronic Library (MELCAT) serving all of Michigan.

Last year, the library circulated 181,360 items, processed 7,378 interlibrary loans and offered 433 programs attended by 9,012 children, 455 young adults and 279 adults. The library supplies free and secure wi-fi 24 hours a day, seven days a week at all six locations — used 217,215 times in 2013.

All these services are provided by four full-time and 31 part-time library employees. Complete statistics can be found at www.branchdistrictlibrary.org.

The last time voters were asked and approved a library millage was 23 years ago. Over the last four years, the District Library Board was forced by lack of funds to cut public hours, slash the book and materials budget, first freeze and then reduce employee wages and benefits.

The Branch District Library is a gateway to knowledge, information, and entertainment for the public. Library materials and programs are available

to every resident in the community. Since 1837, Michigan has guaranteed access to public libraries in each Constitution adopted, through library funding always has been primarily a local matter.

Think of the Library Millage vote as an investment in the quality of life in your community, a share in the future. At \$25 a year per \$100,000 in value of property owned, it's a small investment in a major public good. For less than the cost of one hard-bound book, the District Library can provide thousands of books and materials we all can share, learn from and use in the most eco-friendly way.

I hope you will join me in voting YES for the library millage — the only question on the BACK of the ballot.

Dorothy Cherry,
Coldwater

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YOUR VIEWS

What's in a library?

To the Editor:

What's in a library?

A typical response would be books, computers, DVDs.

However, to understand the importance of a library to a community, the better question would be: Who's in the library?

In the library, a daughter chooses large-print books for her mother in an assisted-living facility. A staff member helps a father find a book for his son on coping with loss. Across the room, a child looks for books written by her favorite author.

A widower searches for books to read in those now too-quiet evenings. A group of homeschoolers has come to work on a project together. A literacy volunteer tutors a man who hopes to improve his job opportunities. A woman looks through historical materials while a teenager safely browses the Web. With close to 130,000 items in the Branch District Library System (BDLS) and over 173,000 visits to the six library buildings in 2013, the possibilities are endless.

Even the question of who's IN the library doesn't tell the whole story. Through computers, library users can access needed materials without walking through library doors. The BDLS has purchased OverDrive (downloadable audiobooks), Tumblebooks (downloadable materials for children) and the ever-popular Mango language (basics of over 40 languages). With access to Woodlands downloadable library (eBooks) and Michigan eLibrary (MEL) databases, BDLS provides patrons with an easy pathway to an ever-increasing variety of computer-accessible materials. Finally, through its outreach service those who are physically unable to come to the library can also be kept connected to the library.

Without a doubt, libraries improve the quality of life in a community. Therefore, if you care about the needs of children, seniors, and everyone in between, please go to the polls on Aug. 5. Vote YES for the library millage to restore money lost from other funding sources.

Cindy Sebald, *Union Township*

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**SHOWING
HER
SUPPORT**

Mary Smith, 99, a dedicated Branch District Library supporter, placed a sign supporting the half-mill on the Aug. 5 primary ballot. The BDL needs the millage to restore and maintain services.

COURTESY PHOTO



Coldwater *Daily Reporter*, July 31, 2014, page A3

PROPOSED MILLAGE

Exchange Club hears library update

COLDWATER — Branch District Library director Evette Atkin spoke to the Coldwater Exchange Club recently, highlighting facts to support additional millage for the library at the upcoming election.

According to Atkin, the library had over 23,000 visitors in the first quarter of 2014. Sixty percent of residents in the city of Coldwater have an active library card.

In addition to books, the library provides free computer time, DVDs and enrichment and educational programs for adults and children.

A millage increase will be on the Aug. 5 ballot, seeking additional funding for library services.



Above, library director Evette Atkin, library volunteer Dr. James Troust, and Exchange Club member Joanne French (right). COURTESY PHOTO

More info

For more information, visit the library web page at www.branchdistrictlibrary.org/.



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AUGUST ELECTION

Library millage on Tuesday ballot

By Chris Worst

Twitter: @ChrisWorst_TDR

BRANCH COUNTY — Branch County residents will decide Tuesday if the Branch District Library (BDL) should receive a new millage to help cover operational expenses.

The millage would be .5 mills and would last until 2022. According to information provided by the library, the last time the BDL requested was in 1991 when the library system was created.

Evette Atkin, director of the Branch District Library, spent last week traveling to the various BDL branch libraries to answer questions regarding the millage. She said that revenue traditionally collected to help

LIBRARY

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fund the BDL, such as from the weigh station on I-69 and penal fines, have steadily decreased.

“Just in the past month, our penal fund revenue has gone down over \$5,000,” Atkin said. “I expect it to keep going down.”

If passed, the tax would cost the average Branch County household \$18.80 a year. The BDL reports that it would generate \$645,800.37 in the first year, with the total revenue decreasing in following years.

“We have enough in our reserves to cover six months of operating expenses,” Atkin said. “If we don’t receive additional funding, we will have to see additional significant cuts ... we would have to cut services, which means staffing ... I would not be surprised if various branches in the district were to experience multiple full day closures.”

SEE LIBRARY, A5

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Libraries are important

Some of my earliest memories are of going to the library in Coldwater and checking out books.

I can't say that I was the most regular of library attendees, but I always participated in the summer reading program.

I remember one summer in particular when the first thing I did upon getting out of school for the year was have my mom drive me to the library to check out "The Chronicles of Narnia: the Lion, The Witch and the Wardrobe," and spending the rest of the afternoon on my front porch reading about Turkish Delights, a bunch of children and a delightful faun.

My library attendance went down as I went through middle and high school, but once I went off to Michigan State University, I once again found myself checking out tons of books, some for pleasure and others for work.

Quite frankly, I don't know where I would be or who I would be without libraries. The one in Coldwater allowed me to travel to distant lands and learn new ideas without having to spend a ton of money on traveling expenses or



CHRIS WORST

at a bookstore (although my family did quite a bit of both of those as well).

Libraries are a resource that should be treasured.

I've covered several events held at libraries since I began working for the newspaper, especially at the Bronson Branch Library. Most of these have been intended for little children, and every time, I see children with beaming faces.

I hope these children will be able to continue to use libraries throughout their lives so that they may learn and grow.

We as adults have a responsibility to make sure that happens.

Chris Worst is the assistance editor for The Daily Reporter, Hillsdale Daily News, Bronson Journal and Jonesville Independent. Email him at cworst@thedailyreporter.com.

Coldwater *Daily Reporter*, August 6, 2014, page A1

BRANCH COUNTY ELECTION

Voters approve new library millage

“If this had not passed, we would have had to cut hours and services to an extremely detrimental extent. Now, thanks to the voters of Branch County, their library will not only survive, but thrive.”

BDL director Evette Atkin via Facebook

By Chris Worst

Twitter: @ChrisWorstTDR

BRANCH COUNTY — Voters approved a millage Tuesday which will give extra revenue to the Branch District Library (BDL).

The millage raises taxes by .5 mills for eight years. It will cost the average Branch County household an additional \$18.80 a year. Funds will be spent on library operating expenses — a category which includes salaries, utilities, materials and supplies.

BDL director Evette Atkin said the millage was necessary.

“If this had not passed, we would have had to cut hours and services to an extremely detrimental extent,” Atkin said via Facebook. “Now, thanks to the voters of Branch County, their library will not

only survive, but thrive.”

The measure passed with 4,281 votes in favor and 1,735 votes against it.

The library has steadily lost revenue due to a decrease in penal fines. In 1991, the library collected \$276,215 in fines. In 2013, that number dropped to \$193,402. This number has fluctuated since 1991, with a high of \$413,441 collected in 2007 and a low of \$166,159 collected in 1994.

“The library, though still funded below the state average, will be in good shape for the next eight years,” Atkin added.

Prior to the passage of the millage, Branch County residents paid .605 mills in library taxes — approximately \$22.74 a year. With the new tax, residents will pay approximately \$41.54 a year.



6-year-old Zachariha Therrian plays a game with his mother, Sandra Therrian, at the Branch District Library-Coldwater Branch on Tuesday. CHRIS WORST PHOTO

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SUMMER READING PROGRAM WINNER



8-year-old Jacob Blair poses for a photo with his new bike. Blair won the bike through the Branch District Library-Coldwater Branch's Summer Reading Program.
CHRIS WORST PHOTO