

Interview with Bob Jones  
Director, Milton-Freewater Public Library  
Milton-Freewater, Oregon

Interview conducted on September 14, 2006 by Sharon Porter  
Partial fulfillment of ILS 565-S71

Opened on April Fool's Day in 2003, the Milton-Freewater Public Library is a bustling place, serving over 6,400 citizens in the town proper. There are donor plaques on chairs, shelving units, study rooms, conference and board rooms...anything not moving. It is obvious that the citizens love their library. The building is named after the 1.5 million dollar donors but Director Bob Jones insisted that the name of the library stay the same to reflect the contributions of the public. Their circulation stats have progressed steadily to approximately 58,000 units from 35,000 in 2003. He exhibits strong business acumen.

Surprisingly, (we spent a great deal of time talking about how the construction funding was actually secured--an amazing story in itself!) Mr. Jones notes that money is still the biggest problem he faces. The cost of personnel health care and retirement benefits is eating up all the gains they made when adding three part-time staff members in 2003. He has had to reduce one staff member already and fighting to keep another. He is writing a grant for the genealogy collection and in that grant has included personnel to help with that area. Their membership in a county library district gives him some tools to leverage the city into providing funds for the library materials budget. Through an interagency agreement, the city must meet 20% of what the District provides for materials. He uses local resources and connections quite handily.

Mr. Jones reflected on the whim of city government in the support of a library. He feels that with the success of the building of the new library and library programs, the City Council has continued to demonstrate support for the library and is a stabilizing factor. He has had council members increase the amount he has asked for in special projects, get a quick second on that vote, and the project is funded. He has very few complaints from patrons and gets many accolades from the public. He describes the library as "the flavor of the month" and so in good favor with city government. His office has a large window and he observes the floor and desk interactions to assure quality customer service.

He says his employees call him the "easiest boss to work with" and employs a progressive discipline approach. He stays out of the staff's way and provides training so they are successful in their work. He has few rules but tries to consistently insist on them. The hardest aspect of being a manager is meeting the expectations of the community. He feels that you only have one time to get it "right." He believes in a harmonious workplace. He had to dismiss an excellent children's librarian who could not get along with the others, despite all efforts for improvement.

His preparation for librarianship came from several degree configurations. His MLS was from an unaccredited program, he completed a 6th-year program, and has a MA in English. He has been a librarian in Texas, Nassau, and Illinois. He networks well (he knew all the librarians that I know in the area, which is geographically far-flung) and rejuvenates at conferences and workshops. It was an inspiring hour and a half with this confident and supportive leader.