



Mission: Make history come alive by collecting, preserving, and sharing the stories and artifacts of our common heritage.

Friday, April 22, 2016

Dear SOHS Member,

You may be hearing reports that the Southern Oregon Historical Society is discussing the need for a County-wide Heritage District with the Jackson County Commissioners. This is true. This past Friday, April 15, the *Mail Tribune* reported on this and several TV stations followed with short reports. While all of them attributed the need specifically to SOHS, it is important to note that a County-wide Heritage District would also provide some funding to over a dozen other historical/heritage groups in the county as well.

The Southern Oregon Historical Society is celebrating its 70th year of service to our community. For most of its first 50 years it was funded through a county-wide tax levy. Decisions by Oregon voters in the 1990s, however, radically restructured public funding and the taxing authority for special districts like this were eliminated and absorbed by counties.

Our Jackson County Commissioners continued to provide some funding until additional measures further constricted revenue. The loss of timber revenue from the harvest of trees on Federally-controlled lands in Oregon put additional financial stress on many counties. Jackson County was not spared this loss of revenue; at a certain point, the county had to make severe cuts to balance its budget. Ongoing funding for SOHS from the county dried up in 2007. Since then, the county commissioners have twice authorized one-time grants of funding to SOHS, in part to keep the Society functioning while patrons pursued the initiative process.

To stay afloat, like many non-profit organizations, SOHS has sometimes chosen or been forced to liquidate properties or other assets to keep core services available. The SOHS Board of Trustees has determined this strategy provides no long-term solution; if continued, it will lead to the closure of SOHS. In the past five years SOHS has unsuccessfully pursued two signature campaigns to put a Heritage District funding measure on the ballot. It has not helped that this occurred during the worst economic recession since the Great Depression. Even so, the second time, the process garnered about 9000 signatures (4000 more than were required for non-tax measures). Additionally, all cities in Jackson County passed resolutions supporting such a measure.

While we believe our community would support such a measure, we are choosing to go directly to the county commissioners for their help. If they sponsor the measure, we do not need to attempt another signature campaign, and the matter can go directly to all

Jackson County voters on November 8, 2016. Recognizing that, as elected officials, the county commissioners must be careful stewards of tax funds, we are committed to making the case to them (and to our community) for this permanent investment.

This past Wednesday, the SOHS Board of Trustees decided to move ahead and work with the county to liquidate a property the Society has a financial interest in. If we are successful, this will provide a temporary funding resource that can help us fund our operations through a November 2016 election. That would allow us to run our many summer programs that are so valued by our community. We invite you to actively participate in our summer programs and to share with others the exciting heritage activities we have planned.

I encourage you to reflect on the importance of preserving history and telling the story of our heritage to new generations. Over the coming months we hope some among you will share the fact of your own support not only with each other, but also with our local newspapers and other news media TV and radio as we demonstrate to our communities why having historical societies and associations in our region makes our communities stronger. Such organizations remind us of how paying attention to our past helps us build hope for the future of our communities. We will be seeking ways for you to help us tell our story again and anew to our communities.

I have attached a document that describes the current benefits our community enjoys because of the active presence of SOHS in Jackson County. I think it will encourage you and provide you with accurate statements about the influence and impact we have on other community programs and people. The last page includes a recent list of other historical organizations that we assist through technical assistance. These groups would also be eligible for funding through a county-wide Heritage District.

Thank you, for your continuing support of SOHS. If you haven't renewed your membership for this coming year, please do so. Your membership helps us keep SOHS programs and event vibrant and accessible in our communities. We welcome your participation in the many SOHS activities scheduled to occur this spring, summer and fall.

Let's think of ways we can tell the story of how “Our Heritage Matters” and be prepared to share that message with others in a compelling manner.

Sincerely,

Dr. Phil Long, President
Board of Trustees,
Southern Oregon Historical Society