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After failed vote, Lansing library re-evaluates

Marlaine Darfler / Guest Column

The Friends of the LCLC are struggling to assess the consequences of the lost vote and are trying to identify ways to continue providing a library to our community and our more than 2,200 patrons.

On May 15, a proposition was narrowly defeated to establish the Lansing Community Library Center, a reading room of the Tompkins County Public Library, as an independent school district library. A school district library is defined as one sharing the same geographical boundaries as the school district with no further interdependencies. The tax base generated would have provided LCLC with one full-time librarian, a budget for materials and books and the money to cover the yearly utilities. The Friends of the LCLC are struggling to assess the consequences of the lost vote and are trying to identify ways to continue providing a library to our community and our more than 2,200 patrons. The Friends are very grateful for the large number of voters who took the time to come out and support the library with a yes vote.

LCLC has been a successful, all-volunteer organization for six years funded solely through private donations and grants. LCLC has always operated in the black, paid for and expanded the building, increased its hours, grown the collection and created successful children's and adult programming over the years. So what has changed? Why is the library now asking the community for financial support?

When the Friends of LCLC opened the doors in the summer of 2001 we

did not foresee the direction this reading room would take or the speed of its growth. Every month since we have opened, our patron and circulation numbers have grown. The request for more and varied services and programs along with increased hours has been a demand we have worked hard to meet. Last month, LCLC had 33 new patrons and circulated 1,522 items. In six years a small reading room has blossomed into a library and community hub. The LCLC that existed in 2001 is not the same library that is serving the community today, and the core group of 60 volunteers can no longer handle the work load and financial needs without some further assistance.

There are two solutions I would like to ask the community to consider. The first would be for approximately 50 new volunteers to sign up over the next few months to meet the increasing demands. We need fundraisers and board members, people to order, process, shelve and check out books. We need computer savvy people to keep statis-

tics and handle our technical services and needs. Storytellers and program organizers are needed, as well as gardeners, cleaners and people to shovel the snow. Doubling our volunteer staff would be a way that LCLC could continue to serve the community well. Even with a paid librarian, this library cannot run without its volunteers.

The second solution requires that Lansing voters take another look at the local tax situation. Lansing has a rich tax base, which is reflected in the high percentage of Lansing money found in the county tax pool. Lansing, through its county taxes, supports the Tompkins County Public Library and the independent libraries of Groton, Newfield, Dryden and Trumansburg. Establishing LCLC as an independent library will allow it to be eligible for an array of support services as well as county, state and federal money not available to reading rooms.

In January 2008, Tompkins County Public Library will begin charging LCLC for the services it currently pro-

vides for free. The TCPL Board of Trustees has not formally approved the specific cost of each service, but LCLC will have to pay for interlibrary loan requests and the pick up and delivery of interlibrary loan books. As a reading room, the LCLC does not have direct access to the Finger Lakes Library System database.

The Friends of LCLC are going back to the drawing board to reduce the past-proposed budget. We are hoping to bring a reduced budget back to the public for a vote. Once passed, the tax rate cannot be raised again without a new vote. We will be asking the community again to consider giving local tax support to its library to secure its future and to bring some of our local county tax money back home.

The LCLC will remain open for regular hours all summer long. Our children's programs will go on as scheduled. Come explore, connect and imagine with us this summer. Beginning in the fall, we will have to look at cutting back on hours and running on an austerity budget to stay open as long as we can manage. All the volunteers at LCLC are dedicated to keeping the doors open as long as possible. We believe that everyone deserves to grow up and grow old with a library.

Marlaine Darfler is the chairwoman of the Friends of the Lansing Community Library Center.