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## Little Steps Lead to Big Success

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*Cornelius Public Library*

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# Little Steps Lead to Big Success

by **Karen Hill**  
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The Cornelius Public Library isn't very glamorous, but the citizens care deeply about it. Recently I spent five minutes listening to a citizen recall the special treat of walking with her family to the library over 50 years ago and I had tears in my eyes.

I started my position as Library Director in October 2006, after taking a side route while on vacation from my home in Ashland. I had never heard of Cornelius and honestly considered pretty much everything north of Salem to be "Portland." I now know how distinct the little towns are in the area.

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, the current population of Cornelius is 11,260 with almost 40 percent Hispanic. Cornelius, whose motto is the "Oregon's Family Town," was renamed in 1871 from Free Orchards. It is located 25 miles west of Portland and 10 miles east of the Coast Range in the fertile Tualatin River Valley. Hillsboro and Forest Grove, with their high-tech industries and farmland, border either side of Cornelius. The City of Cornelius is designated an economically distressed community and has the highest poverty rate in the region with an average per capita income of \$15,290.

The Library occupies a 3,025 square foot area inside the City Hall and has a collection of approximately 21,500 items. The Cornelius Public Library is a city li-



Cornelius Public Library

brary within the Washington County Co-operative Library System (WCCLS) that shares collections, electronic and central resources and some funding. I was hired as the Director after a difficult period in the City's history when funding issues threatened to close the library. The library was operating with a \$103,000 budget (no city funding), 24 open hours per week and no Director. Thank goodness the new City Manager had a vision for a library in "Oregon's Family Town."

New city leadership brought restored city funding to the library. A Washington County library levy passed in November 2006, and although the library technically didn't meet WCCLS performance standards to qualify for more than the 2% funding increase of \$2,055, consortia directors voted to grant the Cornelius Library a one-time additional award of \$12,845. The 2006-07 library budget was almost \$200,000, which allowed the library to increase open hours to 36 per week in October. Staffing increased with my three quarter time position and an additional 10 hours for part-time employees. The library was really primed for success.

In November 2006, I was invited to attend the Ford Family Foundation's Effective Organizations training. This workshop aids nonprofits in rural communities. Besides introducing me to the movers and shakers of the town, it gave me a support system for further training in which both my Board and Friends have participated. Successive sessions really stoked their enthusiasm and built a foundation of support for both policy and fundraising.

December offered the chance to appeal the Ready to Read grant for which we had missed the deadline due to lack of staff. Representatives from neighboring libraries, Cornelius staff and



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Friends turned out in support. Although the successful \$1,690 award seems pretty small, it insured the continuation of the one ever-surviving Cornelius Library program: children's English and Spanish language storytimes.

A volunteer appreciation event continued to set a positive tone for library supporters and remind them of their value to the library even though the toughest times seemed to have passed. The local Boosters Club awarded us funding as did several other individuals and corporations, securing programming for a year or more. The local community center, Centro Cultural, re-established ties with the library to cosponsor two very well attended library events.

Another success was an invitation to submit a full grant application for a highly competitive LSTA grant for a Latino outreach project. Finally, our 2007–08 budget was over \$215,000. This additional funding

allowed us to fully restore hours and gave us a much needed infusion to the collections. All of this occurred in less than nine months!

Locals who know our library still express concern when I introduce myself. “Sure we’re under-funded and struggling to meet OLA threshold standards,” I say, “but the support I have received from generous staff, Friends and volunteers, the administrators with high expectations, and the grateful patrons make every challenge an opportunity for reward.”

Every day in this rural library we remember how we were almost shut down and know, like many Oregon libraries, that our existence is not a given. Every challenge must be taken seriously and worked on diligently, and every success must be shared and celebrated. Working together, the library and the community of Cornelius are addressing these challenges. 🌿

## Estacada's New Library

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Estacada Public Library at dusk viewed from the future Wade Creek City Park.

money and volunteering that was required to build this building shows the level of dedication Estacada area residents have committed to their future,” said current Estacada Library Director Katinka Bryk, who worked alongside Director Beth McKinnon during the project. McKinnon recently retired from her job as director. “Library Director Beth McKinnon spent over 1,000 volunteer hours ensuring this project’s success—and its beauty and functionality is a testament to what a great job she did.” 🌿

*For a list of major donors to the project, please go to [www.estacadalibraryfoundation.org](http://www.estacadalibraryfoundation.org).*

*Photos courtesy of Charles Ingram.*

