Guest Opinion: Library District had a productive year

Last fiscal year, record numbers of people visited and used the resources of Jackson County Library System in the following ways and more:

- Over 160,823 active library cards are used in this system; that is 76 percent of our population;
- 15,800 young readers attended story times and education workshops;
- Over 115,095 computer sessions on library computers were accessed;
- Over 60,699 people met in the library meeting rooms;
- 1,611,543 items were circulated from the collection among Jackson County residents;
- 111,096 library patrons logged into their accounts to download eBooks;
- Over 97,976 questions were asked of and answered by Jackson County Library information professionals;
- More than 20,000 volunteer hours contributed to library service support.

On behalf of the Jackson County Library District Board, Monica Weyhe, president; Maureen Swift, vice president; and members Carol Doty, Susan Kiefer and Jill Turner; it is my privilege to thank residents for support of our libraries and to recognize the achievements of the system over the last fiscal year.

Under the leadership of the Library District Board the community has open, free and equal access to vast and unique learning and cultural opportunities through public library services. Consistently the system has continued to challenge itself and has anticipated and responded to the changing needs of the community.

Good business plans in the public sector are known as "strategic plans." In October of this year the Library District began a six-month strategic planning process to prepare for the next five years, as our current plan expires at the end of this month. A focused five-year strategy will continue alignment of library spaces and programs and formally tie together the educational goals and strategic plans of Jackson County’s educators, employers and community partners.

The District Board appointed a blue ribbon committee comprising a cross-section of community leaders to help drive the planning process. Members will identify service priorities, goals and objectives. Synthesis of key findings from research and community meetings and focus groups will help inform decision-making. To date, input has been collected from more than 1,000 community leaders and residents. This group will deliver the final plan for Library District Board approval in April, 2016.

The Library District is preparing students of every age for their future in a digital world. Emphasis on promoting anytime, anywhere access to collaborative and connected learning environments enriches lifelong learning and opportunity to level up marketable skills.

Library leadership and staff are more committed than ever to providing children, young adults, adults and seniors with new and relevant collections, programs, technology and opportunities that foster ways to learn, connect and grow through the library. We look forward to the adoption of our next strategic plan for 2016 – 2021.

Thanks to all who have participated in the process thus far and to the blue ribbon committee for their generous investment of time and thought. We welcome continued input directly to my office by phone or email. I can be reached at 541-774-6401 or twestergard@jcls.org. Or please visit www.jcls.org and participate online. In the meantime we wish all a happy holiday season.

Tammy Westergard is Jackson County library director.

http://www.mailtribune.com/article/20151220/OPINION/151229989