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Vision of culture center takes step toward reality

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More than 2,500 Carnegie libraries were built around the world between 1883 and 1929. Their benefactor, Scottish-American businessman Andrew Carnegie, was known as the patron saint of libraries.

If Carnegie were alive today, he'd be proud to know that many of these libraries are being converted into arts and culture centers. One that got a major boost forward is the 1909 La Grande building, vacated a few years ago when the Cook Memorial Library was built. Sure, the old library needs some serious sprucing up. But it does hold great potential.

The dream to turn the old library building at the corner of Penn Avenue and Fourth Street into the Union County Arts and Culture Center began just about the same time as the last book was moved out to the new Cook Memorial Library. An energetic and forward thinking coalition of local artists and art and culture patrons deserves credit. They have been working tirelessly together in hopes of renovating the building and turning it into a showcase for local arts and culture.

A big step forward in that dream came May 7 when the UCACC and the La Grande City Council agreed on a lease of the building. The city council, wisely noting how a center would benefit the community for many decades to come, is asking rent of only \$10 a year.


La Grande has some good models nearby for such renovation projects. One is the thriving Pendleton Center for the Arts, located in a 1916 Carnegie Library building along the Umatilla River. That center hosts a smorgasbord of community events that make Pendleton a better place to live.

It's taken four years since the UCACC was created as a subcommittee of the Union County Cultural Coalition to bring the dream of a self-supporting art and culture community center to this point. Now the work accelerates. The mission? Finding funding for renovation. Fundraising activities include September's Grande Gala, which has become a must-go-to event for local arts patrons.

The UCACC's civic-minded leadership envisions a cultural gathering place. The center would showcase not only the region's current talent but also its history and uniqueness. Included would be a thriving mix of local art, music, dance, history and geology. The center would also be available for a wide range of educational opportunities, meetings, conferences, and also offer lessons, classes and open art studios.

People in the community should band together and seek volunteer and charitable-giving opportunities to help make this dream a reality.

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HISTORY OF THE LA GRANDE PUBLIC LIBRARY

In November of 1911, a petition with 160 signatures attached was presented to the LaGrande City Council requesting the establishment of a city library. A resolution was passed, and in December of 1911 the council set aside and dedicated Lot 1, Block 66, Chaplin's Addition, where the present library now stands, for future use as the Public Library.

Correspondence with the Carnegie Corporation revealed that a library must be in existence before funds for a Carnegie building could be secured. To that end, a library was established in the basement of Honan Hall on March 27, 1912, for a rent of \$25.00 a month. The initial collection consisted of approximately 1000 books.

On February 10th, 1913, the Carnegie Corporation informed the library board it would make a donation of \$12,500. for the construction of a library building. An ordinance was then passed accepting the gift from the Carnegie Corporation, with the agreement that the city give not less that \$2500. annually for the support of the library.

On July 25, 1913, the contract for the construction of the new building was given to G.H. Rush for \$7777. The heating and plumbing contract was given to Hume and Spaeth for \$1269. The architects for the building were Messrs. Block & Bunting. The building was duly completed and the books were installed on December 31, 1913. The

formal opening was held March 16, 1914. Miss Mabel Doty, the first professional librarian to work for the LaGrande Public Library, later wrote that "A large number of citizens were present at the formal opening and the LaGrande Public Library began serving its community."

On September 19, 2006, the La Grande Public Library moved from its old quarters in the Old Historic Carnegie building to a new building, christened the F. Maxine and Thomas W. Cook Memorial Library, at 2006 Fourth Street.



HISTORIC CARNEGIE LIBRARY BUILDING

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