

Hicks says 'libraries require and deserve our support'

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State Rep.-elect reads to kids at special event

By Stacy D. Stumbo
of the Daily Courier

State Rep.-elect Wally Hicks, R-Grants Pass, spent Wednesday morning reading to children at the Grants Pass branch of Josephine Community Libraries during Toddler Story Time.

JCL officials invited Hicks and Grants Pass Mayor Mike Murphy to Story Time to witness one of the services libraries provide to young people, and what stands to be lost without a state grant that pays for early childhood literacy programs.

Hicks is a new father. He and his wife, Laura Hicks, welcomed daughter Josephine Abigail Hicks just last week.

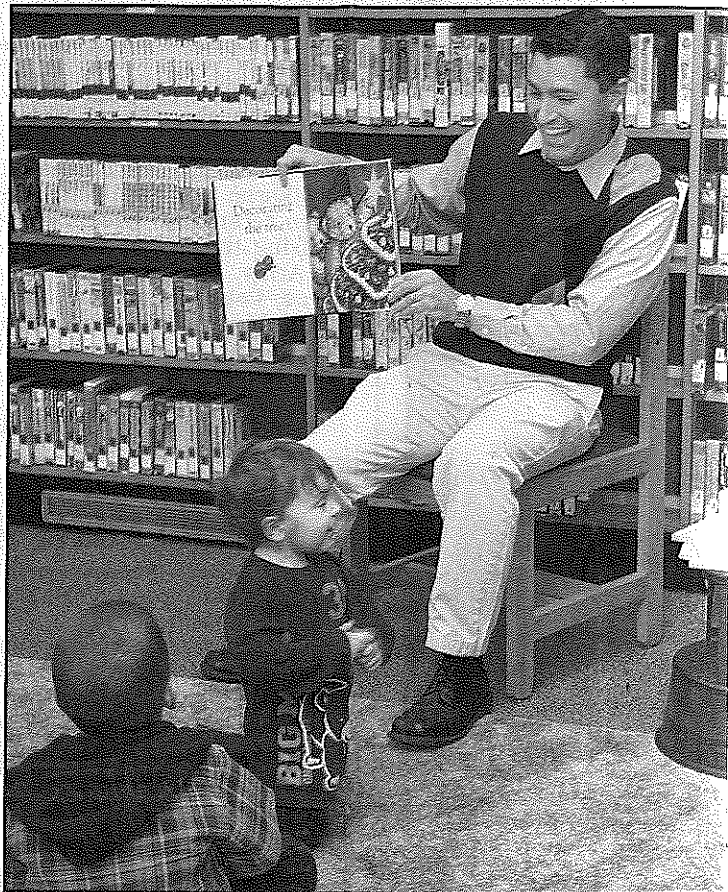
"My wife's mother was a librarian," Hicks said. "We understand how important libraries are. They should be looked at as an investment, not only for society as a whole, but for our economic growth. Businesses want an educated workforce, and it starts here."

Kate Lasky, JCL executive director, said JCL's four libraries have experienced a 26 percent cut in state Ready to Read grant funding. The money is used to buy books for its children's collection and support summer reading programs.

Lasky said the grant provided \$4,000 a year, which paid for about 20 new titles a month. Since memberships and contributions to nonprofit JCL have dropped this fall, the organization will not be able to fill the gap with money from its operating budget.

Murphy said libraries "open the world" to children, adding that their presence says something about the core values of a community.

Hicks said he read "Little Women" to his daughter while she was in utero. He hopes to bring her to the Grants Pass branch as soon as she's old enough for a library card.



TIMOTHY BULLARD/Daily Courier

State Rep.-elect Wally Hicks reads to children at the Grants Pass branch of Josephine Community Libraries during Toddler Story Time Wednesday. JCL stands to lose thousands of dollars in funding for children's books.

"That will be a big moment," Hicks said. "Libraries require and deserve our support."

JCL formed in 2007, after the financially-strapped county closed its libraries in Grants Pass, Cave Junction, Williams and Wolf Creek. The volunteer organization managed to reopen all four branches after more than a year of fundraising. Operations continue to be funded entirely by memberships, grants and private contributions.

"To go without a library is unacceptable," Murphy said. "It's a red flag that says, 'Something is wrong here.' We saw what can happen in real terms when the libraries closed. We can't go there again."

The city contributes about \$5,000 a year to JCL and may not be in a financial position to give more, Murphy said. He hopes the community will step in and contribute.

There is "no end to worthy causes you can give to," Murphy said. "On the other hand, not all causes are equal. The library board has done a miraculous thing here. They have given the libraries back to us. As a community, we need to look at this problem and figure out a solution."

To become a JCL member, send a tax-deductible donation to Josephine Community Libraries, P.O. Box 1684, Grants Pass, OR 97528; or donate by using PayPal on the Web at www.josephinelibrary.org.