

# OTHER VIEWS

**NANCY BROCK**

PRESIDENT OF FRIENDS OF THE ABILENE PUBLIC LIBRARY

## Library raising funds for northwest branch in 2008

The knowledge that a strong public library system is important for the present and future success of Abilene citizens has motivated Friends of the Abilene Public Library (FOL), the Abilene City Council and city staff to work in harmony toward making the dream of a branch library in northwest Abilene a reality by the summer of 2008.

The following plan was adopted Oct. 25 by resolution of the City Council:

"The Friends of the Abilene Public Library has committed to funding the building rental for the north side branch library for the first two years (up to \$115,000) and will write proposals for grants to fund the acquisition of furniture, equipment, and an initial materials collection (\$594,000). The city would be responsible for providing funding for staff and operations expenses during the first two years and then would take on full funding thereafter."

For the first time in FOL history, FOL is seeking funds for this major project. Over 800 citizens are members of FOL.

With the help of FOL members and

### NANCY SAYS ...



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local foundations, FOL is working to fulfill this commitment. A generous, motivating development is an offer from the Shelton Family Foundation to match their gift of a \$300,000 challenge grant. There are problems facing Abilene that might prompt individuals, businesses and organizations to consider an investment of dollars to meet the challenge of this grant.

Just this week, news articles target-

ed a staggering student drop-out rate and violent crime by youths. How can a branch library be one part of the solution?

A national study reports that libraries have shifted from a passive recreational reading and research institution to an active economic development agent, addressing such pressing urban issues as literacy, workforce training, small business vitality, and community quality of life. Libraries now have a role to build technology skills and to promote entrepreneurial activity, in a setting that is both vibrant and livable.

To be part of the solution a branch library can:

- Contribute to stability, safety, economic development, and quality of life in the surrounding area.

- Specialize in services to residents that match their needs and interests, such as classes for English as a Second Language or small business development, and for computer skills. A specialized collection might include including materials on automotive repair, African American history, and Spanish heritage.

- Offer a smaller, comfortable setting and a personal experience with staff for new patrons who find a large downtown library intimidating. Services at any library are free including computers with internet access for those lacking financial resources to own a personal computer.

- Create a multipurpose resource center serving as a bridge between northwest neighborhoods by providing educational and entertainment materials, as well as social and cultural opportunities.

- Be a resource to increase literacy by promoting early reading habits with children and parents through Storytime for young children and then retaining the interest of teenagers with directed programs using online resources as well as a Teen Book Club.

- Provide programs targeted to prevent school dropouts and to work toward the ultimate goal of building an educated workforce. Three neighborhoods in the northwest have census statistics revealing that 1 in 3 adults lack a high school diploma. The library has resources,

such as online homework support and a summer reading program, to help promote success in school.

- Provide all citizens equal access to library services. The South Branch opened in 1998, but there has never been a public library branch in northwest Abilene.

- Be viewed as needed and wanted by residents, as well as by social agencies and public schools in the area. The input of citizen surveys used to develop the Library's 2004 Strategic Plan documented the need for, and the interest in, expanded library services.

Is it costly? Weigh the cost against penalties paid for by drop-outs and persons poorly prepared to enter the workforce. Join the city and FOL as part of the solution. With your help, we can meet the \$300,000 grant challenge.

*Nancy Brock, a community volunteer and former owner of Sylvan Learning Center, is board president of Friends of the Abilene Public Library, a nonprofit whose mission is to support and promote library services and facilities.*