

A message from the Wheaton Public Library Board of Trustees

WHEATON PUBLIC LIBRARY ANNOUNCES FRIDAY CLOSINGS EFFECTIVE JUNE 4, 2010

Faced with a directive from the City Council to prepare a budget reflecting a \$300,000 cut in tax receipts for the second year in a row, the Wheaton Public Library Board of Trustees voted on May 17, 2010 to reduce hours of operation for the current budget year by closing the library on Fridays, effective June 4, 2010. Colleen McLaughlin, President of the Library Board wants to assure its patrons that “this was not an easy decision to make. We deeply regret the impact our decision will have on the public and our staff. Our employees will be required to take 26 unpaid furlough days this year. That amounts to an approximate 10% reduction in earnings and we know that this will cause a hardship for many. But, after prolonged analysis and discussion, the majority of the Board felt that this was the best way to meet the challenge of balancing a budget that has been decreased by \$600,000 in a two year period and still meet our responsibility to see that our library continues to provide quality services to the community.”

Martin Kyle is a past president and treasurer of the Library Board and has served on the Board for 14 years. Kyle is greatly concerned about the City Council’s decision to again reduce the Library’s share of the tax revenue. “Even though we are an independent legal entity, not a department of the city, the fact remains that we are dependent upon the City for funding. With all due respect for the difficult budget decisions the Council has had to make this year, I am concerned that they do not fully appreciate the financial requirements for operating a library of this size. When home rule was established in the late 70s, the library had a voter approved tax rate of up to \$0.23 per \$100 of assessed valuation. Our new budget tax rate is now \$0.1382, the lowest of 16 other area libraries we surveyed. The other 16 local libraries had an average tax rate of \$0.2787.”

Even though the City’s budget has risen approximately 75% since 2000, the Library’s 2010-2011 funding is actually below that which it received in 2000-2001 (\$3,165,000 in 2000-2001 compared to \$3,100,000 for 2010-2011). In the past 2 years alone, the library’s tax revenue has been slashed by 16%. In contrast, no city department has faced funding cuts in excess of 3%. “Our library has the lowest cost of operation in the area by any performance measure you could choose. Ten years of reduced budgets have eliminated all the fat from our operation and we are now into the bone,” states Kyle.

By closing on Fridays, instead of cutting staff, all library services can be retained. Children’s story hours and the popular Great Beginnings, an introduction to the world of books for babies, will be shifted to other days. Reference service, interlibrary loan, homebound delivery service, book discussion groups, and other popular services will be retained. According to Don Armstrong, the Board’s current treasurer, “the Library exists to provide services to its patrons, and staff are required to provide those services. We simply can’t cut staff and still provide the services our patrons expect. We already have the lowest staffing levels of any library in the area, comparably speaking.”

The Wheaton Public Library has only 24 full time employees, 2 of whom are maintenance employees and 50 part time employees (including 19 student assistants) to staff a 124,518 sq. ft. library that provides a full range of services, 69 hours/7 days a week, to an average 50,000 people per month. By comparison, the 16 other area libraries surveyed averaged 40 full time employees and 86 part time employees. For example, Des Plaines (population 56, 945) is a community comparable in size to Wheaton (population 55,416). Wheaton’s library is physically 35% larger than the Des Plaines library (124,518 sq. ft compared

to 82,000 sq. ft.) and its annual circulation is 18% more than Des Plaines' (1,340,820 compared to 1,111,558 items). The Des Plaines library employs 44 full time employees compared to Wheaton's 24 and 76 part time employees compared to Wheaton's 50 and is open 72 hours per week compared to Wheaton's current 69 hours. Des Plaines' operating budget is 43% higher than that of Wheaton (\$7,186,238 compared to \$4,097,237). Lisle is another example of how cost effectively Wheaton's library has historically been run. Wheaton's population is almost double the size of Lisle (55,416 compared to 29,568). Its library is less than a quarter of the size of Wheaton's (124,518 sq. ft. compared to 29,500 sq. ft.) and its annual circulation is approximately a third of Wheaton's (428,316 compared to 1,340,820). Lisle has 30 full time employees and 50 part time employees and an annual operating budget of \$4,261,427, 4% higher than Wheaton's.

McLaughlin explains the Board's decision in this way. "The Board firmly believes that if strong measures are not taken now, we will only be digging ourselves a bigger hole for the future. Our decision was driven by the desire to maintain service levels and be as fair as possible to our employees. If we were to attempt to meet our budget shortfall by eliminating employees while maintaining a 7 day a week operation, we would be forced to eliminate so many people that the library would rapidly become no more than a book and multi-media depository. Our library gained national recognition as a Top 10 library in its peer group, a distinction we hope to regain one day. It would break our hearts to see our library reduced to mediocrity. Hopefully, these measures will not be permanent. Throughout the year, we will, as we always have done, monitor our financial situation and re-evaluate our ability to increase daily operations."