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Nebraska MPLA Board Report
July 23, 2005 Submitted by Nina Little, Nebraska Representative

Nebraska Legislative Update 2005

LB599, a bill that would have affected public libraries in Nebraska communities with a population of fewer than 5,000, was introduced in the Legislature at the initiative of the League of Nebraska Municipalities. As the bill was written it would have permitted second class cities and villages (those cities and villages with a population of fewer than 5,000) to eliminate public library boards of trustees and designate governance responsibility directly to mayors and city councils and village boards. Nebraska has more than 190 communities that fit the fewer than 5,000 population category. Members of Nebraska Library Association's Legislative Committee worked diligently to ensure that testimony from librarians, public library trustees and the Nebraska Library Commission was presented when the hearing was held before the General Affairs Committee. The membership of NLA was also encouraged to attend the hearing and to contact members of the General Affairs Committee by phone and e-mail. Because of NLA perseverance, LB599 never made it out of the General Affairs Committee.

LB217 was written to enact the Public Facilities Construction and Finance Act. Its purpose was to allow a cooperative of local governmental units to issue bonds to finance joint projects which may be serviced by property taxes, regardless of other statutory restrictions on the issuance of debt. "Joint project" was defined as a project financed and operated by two or more public agencies cooperating as a joint entity or joint agency. LB217 also encouraged the joint issuance of bonds for information technology in libraries operated by counties, municipalities, school districts, educational service units, and community colleges. Cities would be allowed to issue debt to build buildings and purchase or replace technology without a vote of the people and outside levy and lid limitations, if it was done in partnership with another agency. Again, largely due to the work of the NLA Legislative Committee before the hearing held by the Government, Military and Veterans Affairs Committee, LB217 was unanimously sent to General File, was adopted by the Legislature and approved by Nebraska Governor, Dave Heineman, on April 7, 2005.

New Director at the University of Nebraska at Omaha Library

Stephen Shorb has been named Library Dean at UNO. Mr. Shorb comes to Omaha from the University of Florida where he was associate director of university libraries. He began his duties at UNO on May 23, 2005. John Christiansen, vice-chancellor for academic and student affairs at UNO stated, "Special thanks go to Dorothy Willis, who has done extraordinary work as interim dean." Dorothy is a member of MPLA and is the newly elected President of Nebraska's Eastern Library System Board.

Welcome to a Few Other New Library Directors in Nebraska

Joyce Grass is the new director in Tekamah. Karla Shafer has been welcomed to the library in Hooper and Ruthann Bargmann is the new director in Bancroft. Bancroft is the home of the John G. Neihardt State Historic Site.

Neighboring Nebraska Communities Build New Libraries

The United States Department of Agriculture Rural Development awarded over \$1 million in a low interest loan to the Wahoo Public Buildings and Grounds Association to construct a 12,000 sq. ft. public library. Wahoo city mayor, Daryl Reitmajer, stated, "The USDA Rural Development loan is allowing us to make immediate progress in the building of a library. Our existing library is currently housed in the City Hall, and is very short on space. The low interest loan made this project a reality for our community without an additional burden on our taxpayers."

Because of the generosity of Ed and Donna Robinson, whose family founded the Robinson Seed Co. in Waterloo, Nebraska in 1888, the town of about 475 residents will have a new library. The 5,000-square-foot, single-story red-

brick building will sit on a two-acre site owned by the Robinsons who donated the site and \$1 million for building the library and establishing an endowment for its operation. The ground breaking celebration was held June 20, 2005.

NEW at McCook Community College Library in McCook, Nebraska

Ten laptop computers with wireless internet capabilities are now available for students to check out at the von Riesen Library at McCook Community College Library and students are very pleased. "They've been very popular, the students really seem to like them," Library Director Pat Bonge said. "The students like being able to move around the library instead of sitting at a table." After little more than a month in service the laptops were checked out more than 300 times resulting in an overall increase in computer usage. Flash drives and CD burners are also available for check out. The elimination of wires and cables at a central table near the entrance has also given the main floor a new personality. Desktop units are still available to be used.

Nebraska Library Association/Nebraska Educational Media Association 2005 Annual Conference

The NLA/NEMA conference takes place September 28-30, 2005 at the Cornhusker Hotel in Lincoln, NE. The theme is "Libraries: Heart & Soul of Communities". Check out the NLA web page at <http://www.nla-nema2005.info/> for details.