

FRIENDS OF THE LONDON PUBLIC LIBRARY

**Presentation to City Council
February 2, 2011**

Friends of the London Public Library is a volunteer organization representing over 600 people which includes membership and volunteers. It was organized in 1993 with a mandate to raise funds to enhance library programs and collections and to advocate on behalf of the library.

It was started because of the belief of interested citizens, library staff, and trustees that the London Public Library is a great civic institution in need of support and volunteer assistance.

As fund raisers, in our 19 years of operations, we have contributed almost one million dollars to enhance Library services. So strong is our belief in the value of the public library that we hope to be around for many years to provide continued support for our library and community.

Today, it is in that second role as advocates that we are speaking in support of the London Public Library proposed budget.

Research indicates that in tough economic times library service increases dramatically - this is true in both Canada and the U.S. According to a recent Harris poll, 75% of Americans have a public library card, the biggest number since the American Library Association began keeping records in 1990. According to the Canadian Library Association, two-thirds of Canadians have a library card.

In preparation for today's presentation, I spoke with Library staff to determine library use in relation to use of services, collections, computers, etc. I found that in these economic times, like the U.S. and the rest of Canada, the London Public Library has become more relevant than ever.

In 2010, the Library experienced significant and continuous increases in all areas from 2 to 20% (total visits - 3.2 million, circulation - 4.0 million items and website visitors - 4.5 million.). At the Library's job search centers, thousands of people are looking for vital information on job opportunities, career planning and training, small business management, literacy programs and computer skills development.

Public Libraries are a bright spot in this economy. Public libraries provide free access to all types of materials - books, music, DVD's, audio books, newspapers, magazines, and downloadable audio books.

Public libraries provide communities with public space, promoting mutual support, social inclusion and civic participation. Hard economic times can be isolating, and public libraries bring people together in an inclusive, supportive environment.

In one of the many letters to the editor supporting public libraries (Betsy Reilly - Language arts and early literacy, Faculty of Education, University of Western Ontario, January 26, 2011), it states:

"We need a strong library system to be a thriving city. We need a strong library system as accessible centres for literacy and for a diverse population. We need a strong library system if we are to be competitive in knowledge based economy. Serious cuts in funding to the libraries may in fact be serious cuts to our economic future."

In a research report entitled "Public Libraries - A Wise Investment" that for every \$1 invested, public libraries provide an economic boost of around \$5. That's an incredible return on investment! And that's only what we can measure in terms of dollars-and-cents." (From: Public Libraries - A Wise Investment - Library Research Service. March 2009).

We believe in 2011 the London Public Library will continue to experience increased use.

The London Public Library Board understands the fiscal environment and is willing to do its part to support the efforts. The Board implemented various actions, including wage management, service cuts, and other reductions, in order to meet 2009 and 2010 budget targets. We know the Library and the multitude of services it provides is essential to this community especially in these economic times.

We believe the Library is socially responsive, well managed, fiscally accountable, and demonstrates cost-effective use of public funds.

As Friends of the Library, we will continue to raise funds for enhancements. These funds, raised entirely by volunteers, should never be considered as core funding. We are counting on you to fund the core services to the level which this community expects and deserves.

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