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Dianne Cannestra

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Georgia Archives Saga

Dianne Cannestra

Essay/Opinion

For years the Georgia Archives budget and staff have been cut. Since 1992, Archives staffing has been reduced from 54 to 10. And its budget has been disproportionately cut by two Secretaries of State.

On September 13, 2012 Secretary of State Brian Kemp issued a press release that the Archives would be closed to the public effective November 1, 2012. He was going to put his three percent budget cuts for his agency fully against the Georgia Archives budget, rather than spread the cuts out to the other areas of his office. He also announced he would have to cut the ten employees to three.

A Coalition to Save the Georgia Archives was formed that consisted of all major organizations who are passionate about the Archives, including Friends of the Georgia Archives and History (FOGAH), and we all leapt into action. An on-line petition, a Facebook page, and Twitter account were started, and countless email, letters, and phone calls were being sent to the Governor and all Georgia representatives and senators. As an example of the passion, within a week of the Secretary of State's announcement, there were over 10,000 signatures on the on-line petition.

Within two weeks a rally was held at the State Capitol. Around 300 supporters attended. Outside the capitol a number of supporters carried placards and picketed in front of the capitol. The media covered both events extensively.

About the same time, the FOGAH Board hired a governmental affairs consulting firm, Joe Tanner and Associates, to help direct our efforts in saving the Archives. We had tried to work with the legislatures to restore funding to the Archives with very little success and realized we needed the assistance of professionals.

On October 18, the Governor issued a press release stating that the state would restore \$125,000 to the Archives so it could remain open through June 30, 2013. The Governor also proposed that on July 1, 2013 the Archives would be transferred to the University System of Georgia (USG), pending approval by the General Assembly.

In early January a nine-member working group began the planning work needed to ultimately transfer control and operation of the Georgia Archives from the Georgia Secretary of State to the USG Board of Regents. The group's purpose was to identify and research the immediate issues related to the transfer and bring these before University System Chancellor Hank Huckaby. The group focused on the transition issues; long-term planning will be addressed by another group once the transfer is completed.

Georgia Archives Saga

House Bill 287 transferring the Archives from the Secretary of State's office to the University System of Georgia (USG) was approved unanimously by both houses of the Georgia Legislature and was signed by Governor Deal May 6, 2013.

Effective July 1, 2013 the Georgia Archives was transferred to the Board of Regents and now reports to Steve Wrigley, Executive Vice Chancellor, Administration and Fiscal Affairs. The Governor and General Assembly approved a budget increase of \$300,000 for FY 14 in the Archives budget. With these funds, the Archives will hire three additional professionals and increase part-time staff hours. The funds will allow the Archives to open to the public two additional days a week, Wednesday and Thursday, from 8:30 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. The new hours will become effective July 31, 2013. The additional staff will also allow for increased conservation and processing activities of the Archives collections.

As part of the USG, the Archives will be able to tap the enormous range of faculty, staff and student talent to assist with its mission. Mr. Wrigley has had discussions as well with colleagues in the USG who are excited about partnering with the Archives. The future of the Archives is in great hands.

Dianne Brown Cannestra is President of the Friends of the Georgia Archives and History and a member of the Board of Trustees for Historic Oakland Cemetery. She is an avid genealogist and is a member and officer of many heritage and genealogy related organizations.