

## **Jefferson and Waukesha counties to join together in new library system**

JEFFERSON – Starting on January 1, 2016, Jefferson and Waukesha counties will join together in a new library system that will provide improved library services to citizens of the two counties.

Currently, the 16 public libraries in Waukesha County are alone in the one-county Waukesha County Federated Library System (WCFLS). The public libraries of Jefferson County, which include those in Fort Atkinson, Jefferson, Johnson Creek, Lake Mills, Palmyra, Waterloo, Watertown, and Whitewater, have been part of the Mid-Wisconsin Federated Library System (MWFLS), along with Dodge and Washington counties, since 1980.

Wisconsin's regional library systems, which were formed in the 1970s and 1980s, are state agencies based on county affiliations. They are charged with the mission of providing services that strengthen and improve member libraries. "There are many opportunities for regional library systems to offer services that would be difficult for most libraries to provide independently," explained Connie Meyer, Director of the Waukesha County Federated Library System. "CAFÉ, our Waukesha County shared catalog, is an example of a powerful resource operated by the Federated Library System. Library systems are an excellent example of how collaborations can achieve efficiencies and improve effectiveness."

In 2014, the Jefferson County Library Board began a comprehensive study of the different library systems to which the libraries of Jefferson County could belong. After much research and discussion, a unanimous decision was made to seek a partnership with WCFLS. "The Jefferson County Library Board took a thorough look at five library systems and determined that Waukesha County is an excellent system and the best fit for our county," said Linda Ager, president of the Jefferson County Library Board.

In March of 2015, the WCFLS board considered the request from the Jefferson County Library Board to take in the libraries of Jefferson County. They unanimously endorsed the idea and made a proposal which was in turn approved by the Jefferson County Library Board. At that time, Jefferson County commenced the statutory process required to withdraw from the Mid-Wisconsin Federated Library System and WCFLS began the process required to expand to a two-county library system.

"We are excited about the opportunities that will present themselves as we add the high caliber libraries of Jefferson County to our library system," enthused Meyer. "We will find cost savings for our member libraries through economies of scale, increase access to materials for all of our citizens, and improve our library system's ability to meet its mission. It's not often that the opportunity to realize savings also results in improving services, but we believe this proposal offers a rare opportunity to do both."

Ager concurred with Meyer's assessment. "This is a true win-win because there are clear benefits for both counties," noted the Jefferson County Library Board president. "After the switch, Jefferson County residents will immediately notice they have more databases and can check out more books and other materials. Behind the scenes, our libraries will benefit from the

strong leadership, veteran staff, technological capabilities and the clear vision offered by the new system.”

With the addition of Jefferson County, the Waukesha County Federated Library System will be seeking a new name and appointing a new library system board with citizens from both counties. Both will take effect on January 1, 2016.

To learn more, visit the WCFLS website at [www.wcfls.org](http://www.wcfls.org) or view their Facebook page.