

# What exactly is a special district?

## And how does it support your library?

By **Heather Estrada**

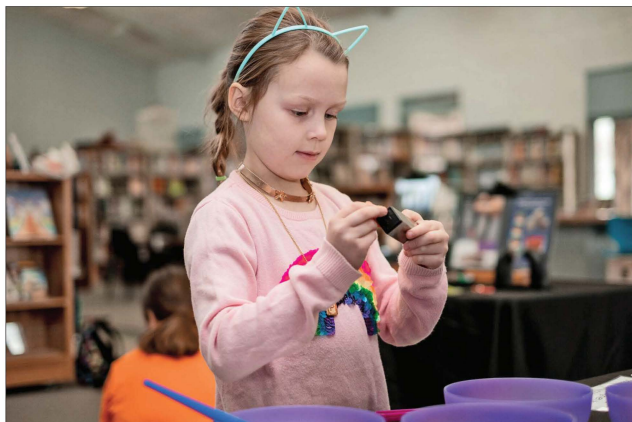
*For Go! Eastern Oregon*

Oregon is one of nine states advocating the federal government to establish a national definition (and recognition) for thousands of special districts across the country.

Allowed by state law, special districts are a form of local government. They are created to meet specific service needs in the community. This form of local government does much of the vital, behind-the-scenes work that allows our communities to run smoothly and safely.

There are many types of special districts in Oregon. They provide various services, such as fire protection, parks and recreation programs, cemetery maintenance, irrigation resources, mosquito control, and of course, libraries!

Voters approved the Umatilla



Yasser Marte/East Oregonian

**Parker Low, 6, learns and experiments with magnets Feb. 16, 2023, as part of the STEAM program at the Stanfield Public Library.**

County Special Library District in November 1986. Each year, a small portion of property taxes paid in Umatilla County go to the UCSLD, and the funds are distributed to all 12 libraries in the county.

These property taxes are used in thoughtful and mighty ways by each library to provide storytimes, programming for

children, teens and adults, internet access, computers, printers and staffing to help navigate technology.

Libraries offer tax forms, voting materials, and of course books, CDs and magazines, as well as access to the digital versions. Regular readers of this column know each month the amazing programs and services

our libraries offer are highlighted here. Libraries provide an intangible quality of life that truly is priceless.

The UCSLD is governed by an elected board of five members who live within the district boundaries. They work voluntarily and on their own time. Their job is to provide vision and oversight, and they are fiscally responsible for the tax money that flows into the district and out to the libraries.

The district is fortunate to have board members who are dedicated public servants, as well as committed and passionate advocates of reaching each resident of Umatilla County with library services.

The current board includes members from four different communities. Having members from different areas helps ensure that citizens from all corners of the county are represented and their varying needs are considered.

Current board members are

Caty Clifton of Athena, Kathy Thew of Echo, Judy Bracher of Helix, and John Thomas and Nick Nash of Pendleton. They are fellow citizens who give their time to ensure that each city in Umatilla County has the benefit of a library — a safe space for kids and adults to gather, make connections, learn new skills, access resources, and foster a connection to one another and the wider world.

The board meets monthly with district staff to stay informed about the current projects and issues from the 12 libraries, and to provide oversight and financial accountability for the tax money.

During this election season take a minute to thank a local public official. Also, thank fellow citizens who serve on boards.

For more information on all 12 libraries in Umatilla County, check out the district's website at [www.ucslid.org](http://www.ucslid.org).

*Heather Estrada is director of the Umatilla County Special Library District.*