

Libraries in state face closings, cuts

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GREENWOOD – Indiana libraries are delaying repairs, limiting purchases of new material and closing their doors as they bow under the weight of statewide property tax caps and declining revenue.

The Johnson County and Greenwood library systems face shortfalls of about 10 percent next year. Edinburgh plans to spend 5 percent less next year. And two branches of the Hammond Public Library system have closed while facing a \$1.2 million shortfall.

The changes are the latest to hit the state's libraries, which have been reducing hours, cutting employees and taking other steps to offset the loss of revenue from the tax caps and the struggling economy.

“We've had to do more with less,” said Cathy Hamm, director of the Edinburgh library.

Hamm told the Daily Journal her facility doesn't expect a shortfall next year but reduced its 2010 budget by about \$12,000, or 5 percent, after not bringing in enough money this year.

The cuts include eliminating subscriptions to the Wall Street Journal, laying off a part-time employee and closing four hours more a week.

Johnson County library officials say they expect to buy fewer books and other materials but don't know how many fewer at this point. The Indiana Department of Local Government Finance informed the libraries about the projected shortfalls after they approved their 2012 budgets, so they'll have to go back and adjust spending.

Several libraries are turning to private fundraising to pay for programs, including children's story time. Johnson County is doing a marketing campaign to promote the value its libraries offer to the community.

The campaign focuses on the services the library provides while also soliciting donations, director Beverly Martin said. She said another option is to raise money through special events, such as talks by high-profile authors.

Hammond Public Library Director René Greenleaf said residents need to speak up and donate to rally support for libraries. Two of Hammond's branches have closed because of tax caps, a frozen tax levy in Lake County and low collection rates.

“The Hammond Public Library isn't the only library cutting hours,” Greenleaf said. “All of us have been affected by the economy.”