

**[Note: This request was denied because it was too small. We later asked for \$100,000 (on the advice of Mr. Hernández) and received the grant.]**

American Electric Power Foundation  
c/o Fred Hernández  
933 W. 19th St.  
San Angelo, TX 76903  
Re: Alpine, Texas, Capital Campaign  
Request: \$40,000 toward construction of a new central public library

Dear Mr. Hernández:

As George Santayana said, "it seems a dreadful indignity to have a soul controlled by geography." And controlled by geography is exactly what the population of Alpine, Texas, is.

Alpine is located in the northernmost part of Brewster County, Texas—an area encompassing 6,193 square miles and that is larger than the states of Delaware and Rhode Island combined. There are 1.4 persons per square mile in Brewster County, compared with 76.5 in the rest of Texas. Residents living in the southern portion of the county—Big Bend National Park, Terlingua, and Lajitas—have to travel over 100 miles of desert highway to access significant library services. Residents of Alpine are 70 miles from the nearest Interstate Highway, two and a half hours from the nearest commercial airport.

Even though we're isolated, our children need to be able to compete with children from Midland/Odessa, San Angelo, El Paso, even New York. Our seniors want to be able to take advantage of technology so they can keep track of their grandchildren. An average of 300 tourists drive through Alpine each month (according to the Chamber of Commerce) and need a place to check e-mail or look up a phone number. Because nearly half of us are poor, the Alpine Public Library is the only place many of us can use a computer or take online classes or get access to entertainment like books and movies.

Isolation is a barrier for the citizens of the area, but it is not the only one. Poverty, underemployment, low educational attainment, and language barriers further isolate the community.

These characteristics together create a vicious cycle of poverty and illiteracy. Without English-language skills, the unemployed cannot complete a job application and the underemployed cannot rise to better positions. Without jobs, the family remains in poverty. Without adequate family income, children cannot attend college or, worse, drop out of school to go to work to help support the family. The elderly living on very limited income find themselves isolated from family members who have moved to greener pastures. Those most affected by poverty in Brewster County are the very young and the elderly.

The Alpine Public Library enhances the quality of life of the residents of and visitors to Alpine, Brewster County, and the Big Bend region by providing free access to sources of information, literature, culture, and entertainment. It is important to note that, although the Sul Ross State University library is located in Alpine, its primary purpose is not to serve the general public. It offers virtually no children's programming and no free public-use computers.

There is a common perception that home computers and use of the Internet have made the use of library facilities less important. That has not proven to be so at the Alpine Public Library. Circulation alone has experienced a 23% increase since 1998.

Significant growth and demand for services are placing a strain on the existing facilities. The state's demographers predict 3.4% growth in Brewster County in the next decades, but library circulation has increased 23% in the last 10 years. Space is particularly inadequate for children's programming and computer/Internet access. We currently operate in 3,800 square feet and have determined by careful study of our current and future programming that we need approximately 9,000 square feet to operate efficiently and at the level of service the community expects and deserves.

The Alpine Public Library is a 501(c)(3). It is unique in that it is an independent private corporation whereas most libraries are under the auspices of local government. The library is governed by a board of up to 15 directors. The Friends of the Alpine Public Library operate under the library's nonprofit-status umbrella and serve as a volunteer-staffed fund-raising arm. The group recruits volunteers and carries out various programs to assist the library and its patrons.

The library has contracts with both the city and the county that provide basic operating funds. Other expenses are covered through grants from private foundations, state and federal funds and services, fund-raising by the Friends of the Library, sales at the Re-Reads bookstore operated by the Friends of the Library, and donations from individuals and local businesses. The Friends of the Library provide approximately 10% of the operations budget of the library each year.

To further enhance the lives of our local children, the library's outreach includes science workshops, summer reading clubs, Toddler Time, the Genre Challenge reading program, and arts and crafts programs. The Alpine Independent School District frequently partners with the library in cooperative programs such as story time and book review preparation.

Services offered at the Alpine Public Library are free or cost only enough to cover the library's expense to provide the service (e.g., sending faxes). Therefore, the Board of Directors will secure the long-term viability of the organization through a thoughtful and systematic fund-raising process that reaches out to foundations and corporations as well as local, county, and state government and local businesses and individuals. Brewster County has offered to serve as construction manager and to secure all construction bids for us.

In 2005, the Alpine Public Library Board learned that the library's current facility

was in irreparable condition as reported in an engineering survey. The search began for a suitable site for a new facility, and a plan was developed for raising the funds necessary to make a new building a reality.

The City of Alpine, Brewster County, the Alpine Independent School District, and the public stepped up with enthusiasm. To date approximately \$700,000 in cash, in-kind donations, and land has been raised, and construction assistance estimated at 30% of the total cost of construction has been promised by Brewster County.

As of this date, \$1.7 million in funding will be needed to complete the first—construction—phase of the project, with an additional amount needed for furnishings (Phase 2).

The Alpine Public Library has strong, ongoing support from Brewster County and the city of Alpine. Citizens offer more volunteer hours each year. The Friends of the Library provide financial support through personal gifts, income from Re-Reads bookstore, and other fund-raisers. Civic clubs including the Rotary Club and a local book club have made the library a major project of their organizations. All members of the Board of Directors have made a financial contribution to both the library's ongoing operations and the building project.

In today's technologically advanced society, there is no acceptable reason for a community and its citizens to be isolated from the world. With adequate Internet access, children can be educated in the global community; individuals can attain their educational goals and advance their education without ever being on a college campus; and seniors can become computer literate to aid in communicating with distant family, seeking health-care information, and managing their assets. Isolation may be a geographic fact, but it does not have to be a barrier.

Free access to thousands of books, audiobooks, videos, children's programs, reference materials, and the Internet can help bridge the poverty gap.

The patrons of the Alpine Public Library span eight decades and an even wider expanse of interests. They have come to rely on the library as a resource that can take them from the here and now in Far West Texas to any destination they choose.

The new, larger central Alpine Public Library will reflect the needs of the community. It will be an ADA-compliant family center offering programs and services for all ages, a high-tech center to support a high-tech society, a cultural center offering diverse programs for all citizens, and an information center for a community of lifelong learners.

We are therefore asking that the American Electric Power Foundation consider a donation of \$40,000 toward the construction of the new Alpine Public Library.

Sincerely,

Mary Jane Morgan  
Chair, Capital Campaign Committee  
Alpine Public Library Board of Directors