

# trustee tale

Newsletter for Trustees of Winnefox and Outagamie  
Waupaca Library Systems

## Trustee Workshop Features Cal Potter



September's Trustee Workshop in Neenah featured former state legislator Cal Potter, who now heads the Division for Libraries, Technology and Community Learning in the Department of Public Instruction. Potter discussed ways that trustees can talk with their legislators on the state and local level to let them know the importance of libraries and library funding for their communities. Potter also told trustees they are best-equipped to carry that message to legislators, who he says, are ready to listen.

## Mastering The Political Process

### From Good Will To Advocacy

Trustees must be lobbyists as well as good will ambassadors for the library they serve. Trustees who are effective advocates learn how to affect the decision-making process. They understand how the political process works, get to know local and state elected officials, express opinions where they count, and mobilize and coordinate support when needed. As the official representatives of the citizens, trustees have credibility with elected officials whose decisions are crucial to the library's future. Trustees who are well informed and articulate can make a big difference.

Lobbying is the process of expressing opinions to decision makers and supporting those opinions. Lobbying is not a "dirty" word but a cornerstone of democracy: citizens have an obligation to express their opinions and concerns with elected officials. There are many ways to lobby. Personal contact may be the best. However you choose to lobby, the following can help you do so successfully.

### Tips on the Art of Lobbying

Hostile or threatening behavior has a negative impact. Be considerate and polite. Take a positive approach.

Timing is important. Keep in touch with officials all year and keep on top of political developments that affect the library. Don't wait until it's too late.

Credibility is crucial. Make clear who you represent. Have a clear purpose in mind.

Know what you are talking about. Focus on facts, figures, evidence. Be concise, clear, and consistent.

Be persistent but reasonable. Politics is the art of compromise. Respect the opinions of others.

Know the personality and interests of the official you are lobbying. If you can relate your goals to his or hers, you may be more successful.

Be prepared to back your opinion with those of others, but avoid repetition and overkill.

Orchestrate your lobbying effort carefully with others.

Thank officials for their consideration even when they don't agree. When an elected official supports you, follow up with praise and positive reinforcement.

from *The Utah Public Library Trustee Handbook*  
available at OWLS web page (<http://www.owls.lib.wi.us>) under  
Links for Librarians in the trustee section



## Library Legislative Day February 13, 2001 Inn On The Park Madison, Wisconsin

Join other library trustees, staff and friends  
in telling local legislators about the  
importance of libraries.

If you are interested, please contact your library  
director or your library system.  
Winnefox Library System: (920) 236-5220  
Outagamie Waupaca Library System: (920)

## Trustee Responsibilities: A Post Script

by Greta Thompson

Lists are a favorite way to organize material. You can find books about the seven principles for living longer, the ten best strategies for becoming a millionaire or the 100 best books of the 20th century. You won't find lists of trustee responsibilities on the best seller list, but lists of those responsibilities do exist. While useful and well thought out, many of them omit three responsibilities that I believe are fundamental. In the years that I've worked at one of the state's library systems, I've heard librarians and trustees talk about the importance of these issues. My list doesn't replace other lists, but supplements them.

### *Ask for what the library needs*

It's not your job as a trustee to save the municipality money. Many others work to do that. As a board, you need to have a vision of what you want your library to be. Think big. Dream. You don't need to worry about the budget or what's practical. You're not planning tomorrow's work or even next year's. You're dreaming of some day, and with that vision in mind, ask for what you need to get there. Maybe you won't get the money even for the first step or two; maybe you won't get it until you've asked three or four times. One thing is sure. If you don't ask, you certainly won't get the money.

A case in point is the number of libraries who have one or more computers today, which was unthinkable even four or five years ago. Some of the smallest libraries in the state have access to the Internet and a shared online catalog and circulation system. The money was there in these communities when it was needed, sometimes to everyone's surprise. Ask and you just might receive.

### *Support your library director*

If you can't support her, fire her for the sake of the library. Once you've hired the best person possible, let her do the job. Encourage her to present recommendations, not just problems, so you and she can have confidence in her judgment. Recognize that it's the library's responsibility, not the director's, to pay for required training (e.g., the four courses required for a Grade II or the renewal of a Grade III certificate). Budget for continuing education for the director and the staff. Workshops inspire, teach practical skills, and provide a community of colleagues with whom to share concerns. Pay staff for time off the public service desk and time when the library is closed. This is essential for doing administrative work and program planning. Please don't expect your librarian to donate hours over and above those for which you pay her (see the first responsibility).

Nurturing the board's relationship with the director takes time and attentiveness. You need to watch out for some possible pitfalls. Talking with the staff about how the library should be run or what the director is doing is a mistake. In small communities you often know the staff, maybe even played together as children; but it's important not to do business with staff, even or especially when there are problems. Beware of the long-time employee who knows more than a new director, whether she's still working or perhaps retired and interested in serving on the library board. Don't hold meetings without the director; if she is not there, she should at least know you're meeting and why. Mutual respect and trust will strengthen your library.

Supporting your librarian means evaluating her annually. It's an opportunity to recognize her achievements, identify and discuss setbacks or problems sympathetically, and to help set objectives for the coming year--not nitpick and criticize.

### *Use the library*

Doing so will make you more aware of its resources, services and the challenges the director and staff face daily in carrying out the programs and services. Checking materials out to patrons may seem easy until you've observed a few patrons without manners. Helping someone find the right book to answer a need may be more significant than you thought. Unless you know the library well, how can you make good decisions on its behalf and act as an informed advocate for it? All of these are important reasons to use the library, but there's at least one more: use it for your own enjoyment and development.

Those are my three additions to lists of trustee responsibilities. I have one more thought for you. Ask for help when you need it. Get to know your neighboring libraries and their board members. Chances are they're working on the same issues that you are. They can help you, and you can help them. In addition, you have resources available to you at the system level, at the state level, and on the world wide web.

The president of the American Library Association recently called trustees "a secret weapon." She was writing about their potential as lobbyists: "Since they are not usually paid for their service, when they advocate for the library and tell our story they are doing so with no self-interest" (American Libraries, May 2000, 7). If you ask for what the library needs, support your director, and use your library, you'll have a good story to tell.

## Are You Legal? Library Board Meetings

By Ken Hall

As the Assistant Director for the Winnefox Library System, I field a variety of questions from library trustees regarding state statutes, especially concerning library board meetings. Library board meetings are governed by Wisconsin Statute 19.81, which is often referred to as the *Open Meetings Law*. Compliance with this law is easy if four basic rules are followed for each meeting:

The meeting location must be open and accessible to the public. A full agenda must be published at least 24 hours in advance. Full minutes must be taken and be made available to the public. Closed sessions, if any, must follow the format proscribed in the statute.

**The meeting location must be open and accessible to the public.**

To be “open and accessible to the public,” a meeting must be held in place with the doors open so that the public can come and go at any time during the meeting. The building and room where the meeting is held should be handicapped accessible. Accommodations must be made for the hearing or sight impaired if a request is made prior to the meeting.

One of the most frequent areas of misunderstanding is with the agenda. A full agenda must be published at least 24 hours prior to a meeting. To “publish” a meeting, notice should be posted in your library, at your city/village/town hall, and it must be sent to a newspaper that serves your citizens. You are not obligated to pay the paper to print the notice, nor is the paper obligated to print it. As long as it is sent to the paper in a timely manner, it is legal. Though 24 hours is the minimum, sending the agenda at least a week in advance is a good idea.

**A full agenda must be published at least 24 hours in advance.**

Agendas must list all items to be discussed. Be sure to note whether or not a vote will be taken in regard to anything on the agenda. Contrary to a widespread misunderstanding, it is not legal to add an agenda item at the start of a meeting. Boards can hold a brief discussion or provide a brief explanation regarding a question raised by a member of the public. However, only those items listed on the agenda may be discussed or acted upon beyond unplanned public presentations.

Closed sessions are allowed for only three basic reasons: collective bargaining, performance evaluation, promotion or discipline of a specific director, or to negotiate some purchases. They cannot be held to discuss the budget or director compensation unless collective bargaining is involved.

Closed sessions must be noted in the agenda ahead of time. Though discussions can be held in closed session, any resulting actions taken must be in open session. For a complete list of exceptions and explanations, see the statute or contact your library system.

**Closed sessions, if any, must follow the format proscribed in the statute.**

One other common mistake made by boards is in regard to minutes. Minutes are often hand written and kept in the possession of the board secretary. However, meeting minutes must be made available to the public, on file at the library. A copy should be sent to your

**Full minutes must be taken and be made available to the public.**

governing body (your city council, village or town board) and to your library system office as well.

Board members are personally liable for violations of the *Open Meetings Law* and may be fined \$25-\$300 for each violation. Fines may not be reimbursed by the library or municipal government. For a more complete explanation of the *Open Meetings Law* and record-keeping, please contact your system office.



## Reference Questions Rise with Internet Use

Full story at: <http://www.cnn.com/2000/CAREER/trends/11/28/librarians/index.html>

Demand for reference librarians is on the rise, according to a recent story on CNN.com. The November 28, 2000 article quotes librarians from the Minneapolis Public Library and the New York Public Library. Both argue that the idea the Internet will replace reference librarians is nothing but a myth.

“We see now that the Internet is such a huge amoeba,” says Walter Gegner in the article, titled “Looking It Up.” Gegner is the supervisor of the art, music and video department at the Minneapolis Public Library. “It’s going off in every direction and there’s no one profession, no one group of individuals that knows everything going on with the Internet.”

The CNN.com story reports the number of reference specialists working in public libraries has increased by 56 percent in the past five years,

according to Market Data Retrieval, a subsidiary of Dun & Bradstreet that provides information on the education market, including public libraries. Market Data’s research shows that there were 2,634 reference librarians employed by public libraries in 1995. Today, the number is 4,100.

The article finds the biggest change the Internet has brought is the type of information library patrons are seeking. While reference questions used to involve addresses and phone numbers, they now commonly require more in-depth research. That’s perfect for reference librarians.

“Now there’s a great deal of optimism, I think, that librarians are going to have a continuing role. It’s just going to shift its emphasis,” Gegner says in the article. “We always feel like we’re behind where we should be. It’s a constant race to keep up with the developments in technology.”

### Value

It’s unwise to pay too much...  
but it’s worse to pay too little.  
When you pay too much,  
you lose a little money...  
that is all.  
When you pay too little,  
you sometimes lose everything,  
because the thing you bought was  
incapable of doing  
the thing it was bought to do.

The common law of business balance  
prohibits paying a little  
and getting a lot...  
it can’t be done.

If you deal with the lowest bidder,  
it is well to add something  
for the risk you run.  
And if you do that, you will have  
enough to pay for something better.

—John Ruskin (1900)