

trustee tale

Newsletter for Public Library Trustees

Stand Up For Libraries

*By Mark Arend, Interim Assistant Director
Winnefox Library System*

Wisconsin libraries need your help. Due to the state's budget deficit, the Legislature and Governor will have to make some hard choices as they begin work on the next biennial budget. Almost certainly there will be cuts to state library aids and less shared revenue for municipalities. In anticipation of these cuts municipalities and counties are passing tight 2003 budgets.

In tough economic times it's easy for libraries to be seen as a luxury or an "extra" service, not as an essential service for the information age. It's easy to hold the mistaken belief that library users are mainly well-off people who could easily afford to pay library use fees.

The truth is that when times get tough peoples' information needs increase. Libraries are used more. Librarians have long held this belief and research verifies it. A recent study by the University of Illinois found that library use has increased significantly since March 2001, when the National Bureau of Economic Research pegged the beginning of the latest recession. Using statistical analysis, they found that circulation in March 2001 was 8.3 percent higher than would be expected from the trend observed since January 1997. Following the events of September 11, circulation in October 2001 exceeded the trend by 11.3 percent.

As Trustees, you are in an important position. You have been selected to support and speak out in favor of libraries in your community. Many trustees do this very well, speaking to community organizations and lobbying local elected officials. Now you need to do this on the State level as well. State legislators need to hear from community leaders like you about libraries.

You can call your state legislators and speak with them about the importance of libraries in your community. You can tell them how students, jobseekers, families, and other residents are getting the information they need through the library.

And you can join other trustees, librarians, and library friends in Madison on February 4, 2003 for the Wisconsin Library Association's annual Library Legislative Day. This is the day that library supporters from around the state visit the Capitol to promote library issues. You can find more information on Legislative Day at: http://www.wla.lib.wi.us/legis/LLD_flyer_2003.pdf

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Stand Up For Libraries

Library Legislative Day
February 4, 2003
Inn On The Park
Madison, Wisconsin

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

COOL QUOTE

WHAT KEEPS US LIBRARY TYPES
GOING WHEN THE DOTCOMS ARE
GOING BUST IS THIS:

WE HAVE A BUSINESS PLAN THAT HAS
STOOD THE TEST OF TIME, A PLAN IN
WHICH GENERATIONS OF LIBRARIANS
HAVE BELIEVED IN PASSIONATELY, A
PLAN THAT HAS INSPIRED COUNTLESS
LIBRARY USERS AND CITY COUNCILS
BECAUSE OF ITS SIMPLE ELEGANCE.

WHAT WE HAVE IS A BARGAIN WITH
HISTORY AS WELL AS BRILLIANTLY
SIMPLE HISTORICAL BARGAIN.
LIBRARIES PROMISE TO SHARE
KNOWLEDGE AND SEEK WISDOM.

WE KEEP THAT PROMISE, WHETHER
IT IS WITH PRINT, WHAT WE USED
TO CALL NON-PRINT, OR WITH
ELECTRONIC SOURCES.

WE DO IT AT BARGAIN PRICES.
FOR THIS SOCIETY REWARDS US.
NOT MUCH, IT'S TRUE.
BUT WE HAVE A STAYING POWER
THAT OTHER LESS CLEAR BUSINESS
PLANS (LIKE NETLIBRARY OR OTHER
DOTCOMS) NEVER APPROACHED."

—Thomas Hennen,
librarian, author, and creator
of Hennen's American Public
Library Ratings (HALPR)

("Stand Up For Libraries" continued)



If you are unfamiliar with the issues, or don't know what to say to your legislator, talk with your librarian. She or he can fill you in with facts and figures on how busy your local library is and how it's used in your community. For background information on statewide library issues check out the Wisconsin Library Association's legislative agenda at: <http://www.wla.lib.wi.us/legis/2003-05agenda.pdf>.

If you don't stand up for libraries, no one else will.

Wisconsin Public Library Legislation and Funding Task Force

Last spring, State Superintendent Elizabeth Burmaster appointed a task force to review legislation and funding issues relating to public libraries and public library systems and to make recommendations for consideration in developing the Department of Public Instruction's 2003-2005 budget and legislative requests.

The task force, composed of legislators, librarians, and local government representatives, met throughout the spring and summer and recently recommended proposed changes to library law in Wisconsin. These recommendations, if passed into law, will have major changes on library service in the state.

Possible changes that could affect your library include:

- Required minimum library hours open
- Required minimum expenditures for library materials
- New rules for the formation and operation of joint libraries
- New guidelines for reimbursement of crossover borrowing expenses (residents of one community using a library in another)

You can read more about the task force and its recommendations at: <http://www.dpi.state.wi.us/dlcl/pld/liblegis.html>



The Value of Libraries

By Greta Thompson, Assistant Director, Outagamie Waupaca Library System

Librarians often feel that libraries are a self-evident good like apple pie, babies, and a sunlit lake. We shouldn't have to explain why they're important. Everyone knows they are.

Unfortunately, not everyone does know they're valuable, and even those who do often think of them as a community asset that doesn't and shouldn't require much money. In some ways Wisconsin's state laws support that point of view by permitting any community to establish a public library without specifying any particular level of financial support.

Good libraries, like good fire and police services, require funding and trained staff, as well as a wide range of resources and up-to-date equipment. As library trustees you know that better than most people, but saying that to a local or state legislator doesn't make a case. Why does the community need the library? And, we have the Internet, why do we need a library too?

If you clutch when you're faced with these or similar questions, here are some possibilities to keep in mind.



The library supports democracy.

"Libraries make democracy work by providing access to information so that citizens can make the decisions necessary to govern themselves" [*American Libraries* December 1995]. The article goes on to quote the authors of *Democracy and the Public Library*: "The public library is the only institution in American society whose purpose is to guard against the tyrannies of ignorance and conformity, and its existence indicates the extent to which a democratic society values knowledge, truth, justice, books, and culture."

The library levels the playing field.

The library makes all kinds of resources available to everyone from the richest to the poorest, from the best educated to the illiterate, from the Mayflower descendant to the most recent immigrant. It increasingly offers email and Internet access to those who can't afford their own computers, as well as literacy and ESL programs and materials, and electronic databases that provide financial, health, and historical information.

The library helps businesses.

In 2001 over 29 million people visited libraries in Wisconsin. According to a survey done by the Urban Libraries Council, "High foot traffic attracts businesses that depend on people feeling safe using them, key businesses like grocery stores that often serve as private-sector anchors for neighborhood renewal" (*Library Journal*, May 15, 2001). Add to that the services that libraries offer to businesses directly and to community enrichment, and libraries turn out to be a key asset for businesses.

The library nourishes learning and creativity. We think of the public library as a treasure house for children who go to story hours, attend summer reading programs, and do their homework there; and this is indeed a significant role, perhaps the most significant one in a democracy. But it is or can be just as true for adults, who take advantage of the library's resources to learn new skills, read about different cultures and viewpoints, or take part in programs on topics ranging from the works of Stephen Ambrose to wildflowers of Wisconsin.

The library fosters community.

Families can go there together and find something for everyone. Programs can bring people together from all over the community, people who might not otherwise meet, as well as people who might otherwise be isolated and friendless. What's more, the library is the repository of our history in this community, this state, and this country; and we need to study the past in order to know where we are now and what decisions to make for the future.

Librarians help transform data into knowledge. We don't need more information so much as we need the right information in a form that we can use and trust, and that's where skilled library staff come in. Where do I find the information or the book that I need? The Internet site that has relevant, accurate information? For that matter, who can tell me about a novel that I might like as well as the one I just finished?

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("The Value of Libraries" continued)

We frequently hear that libraries are not essential services in the way that fire and police services are, and there is, of course, truth in that. We must have life and safety before we can enjoy either; but we want life and safety so that we can enjoy and learn about and perhaps contribute to the richness of our world and culture. That's when libraries become essential.

Resources/URLs:

"Help for the Advocacy-Impaired Librarian: A Bibliography of Resources on Library Advocacy." Connie Dalrymple. Public Libraries, May/June 2002.

American Library Association. <http://www.ala.org>. See, for example, sections on PR Tools and Materials and Fundraising.

Marketing and PR Links at <http://www.owls.lib.wi.us/info/links/market.htm>

Fundraising Links at <http://www.owls.lib.wi.us/info/links/fundraising.htm>

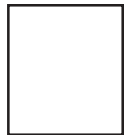
TRUSTEE SOAPBOX

Do you have a question, comment or topic to suggest for a future TrusteeTale? Send an Email to:

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You may also phone your questions to Greta at 920-832-6194.

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If you have questions, comments or suggestions for future articles, send them to:

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