

trustee tale

Newsletter for Public Library Trustees

Advice from Library Trustees and Directors, part 2

By Rick Krumwiede, director, Outagamie Waupaca Library System

A few weeks ago I sent a list of questions to a group of nineteen OWLS library trustees and all of the OWLS library directors, specifically to gather information for this article. I thought it might be interesting and useful to include an article in *Trustee Tales* written from the perspectives of library trustees and library directors. I saw this as an opportunity for trustees to share their experiences and advice with other trustees and library directors. I also wanted directors to be able to share their experiences and perceptions with library trustees. In soliciting responses to my questions, I assured the potential respondents that I would not identify any individual trustee or director.

I am very pleased to report that I received thoughtful and insightful responses from six public library trustees and four library directors. I very much appreciate the effort made by everyone who took the time to respond to my questions. Rather than try to write an article based on these responses, I've simply done some minor editing and included a compilation of the most relevant responses. This article contains the comments from library directors; the trustees' comments were reported in the last issue of *Trustee Tales*. I'm sure you'll find the comments to be self-explanatory.

Responses from Directors

What is the best thing about your library board?

- They are library users and participants.
- They support our program ideas, and they aren't afraid to spend a little money on programs.
- Their willingness to go out on a limb and supported me on difficult issues.
- They care about good library service.
- They give me good feedback about what they're hearing in the community.
- They ask me hard questions.
- Their flexibility and their trust in me.

What is the best practice that your library board has?

- The Board President meets with me the week prior to the meeting to review the agenda.
- They have instituted a committee structure, and they are steadfast about working within that structure. When a committee works on an issue and makes a recommendation, the board is good about supporting it. Things get done much more efficiently.
- Twice per year retreats to discuss services in depth, with no action agenda, just education and discussion.
- They listen to my suggestions, and they have an open mind.

What drives you crazy about your library board?

- Members not showing up for meetings.
- Unwillingness to help with problems emanating from our municipality.
- Only two out of five are library users!
- Nothing! On the contrary, they keep me from going crazy.

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Making the Ask

By Mark Arend, Assistant Director, Winnefox Library System

Asking for money is tough. Almost everyone is uncomfortable doing it. But it's a (sometimes) necessary part of the Trustee's job.

One way to make the job easier to think of it in a different way. The library is an important part of your community. If you didn't believe in the library you wouldn't be serving as a Trustee. You're not asking for money; you're asking for support of an institution that makes the community better, helps people improve their education and job skills, bolsters democracy, and is an important partner in the education of our children.

Once you've reminded yourself why the library is important, here are a few practical techniques to help communicate your enthusiasm and convince others to support the library

Do your homework. Before contacting a company or foundation for a donation learn what you can about the company's business or the foundation's interests. Find out about past donations, their giving timetable, and how decisions are made.

Start at the top. Call the company president's office and ask for an appointment. Tell the secretary or leave a voicemail that you're with XYZ Public Library and you'd like to meet with the President to discuss their possible support of the library.

Persist. If you don't get a call back within a week or so call them again. And again if necessary. If you don't get a reply after three calls drop off a packet of information at their office and ask when you can call back.

Plan and practice. Think about your presentation and rehearse it with someone else or in front of a mirror.

Once you get in the door here are some ideas on what to say.

Warm-up. Spend the first few minutes of your meeting 'warming up'. Chat about the office décor or local community or school events. Small talk is not wasted time; use it to begin building a relationship and to relax.

Information gathering. Ask a few questions about what the company does, where they've donated in the past, and how decisions are made. Even though you've done your homework ask anyway to verify and get more information. Find out what recognition they've gotten for past donations and what type of recognition they'd like in the future.

Present opportunities and seek interest. Explain why support of the library would benefit the company, its employees, or the president.

Silence is golden. Not, of course, that uncomfortable silence when you don't know what to say but a quiet time to allow your prospect to think and digest the information.

Continuations. Often the prospect will need more time to decide. They'll make a general statement with no real commitment like: "We'll review your information and let you know", "I have to talk to some other people here", or "Why don't you call me back in a month or two". Try to nail down a more definite time for a follow-up.

You might say:

- You mentioned your board meets next week. Can I call you back on Friday?
- If we met again on the 17th would that give you enough time?
- As you suggested I'll call Todd about our request. Can you call him to let him know I'll be in touch with him?
- I'll get that information you wanted together and email it to you by Thursday. If we meet the following Wednesday will you have had time to review it?

You'll often hear these objections: "We don't have any money for donations", "We've already allocated this year's budget", "We haven't been happy with the publicity we've gotten from past donations". You can't always overcome objections or refusals but here are some possible responses.

Listen. Hear the original objection out in its entirety. Ask a question if it relates to the objection.

Empathize. Use phrases like "I can imagine how that made you feel" or "I know how difficult it was".

Try to find a solution. Seek common ground by working with them to develop a solution that answers their objections or concerns.

If you follow these tips and believe in your cause, you're likely to come away feeling pretty good about the experience, even if you don't get a commitment. At least you can feel that you've represented the library and made a good effort. If you conduct yourself professionally, the library's image will be enhanced in the mind of the person or company where you "made the ask" even if you don't get a monetary contribution. This can be a long process and you may be setting the stage for future contacts.

This article is based on a presentation by Scott Niedermeyer at the 2006 Wisconsin Library Association Annual Conference.



Trustees Make Up a Vital Part of the Wisconsin Library Association

By Lisa K. Strand, Executive Director, Wisconsin Library Association

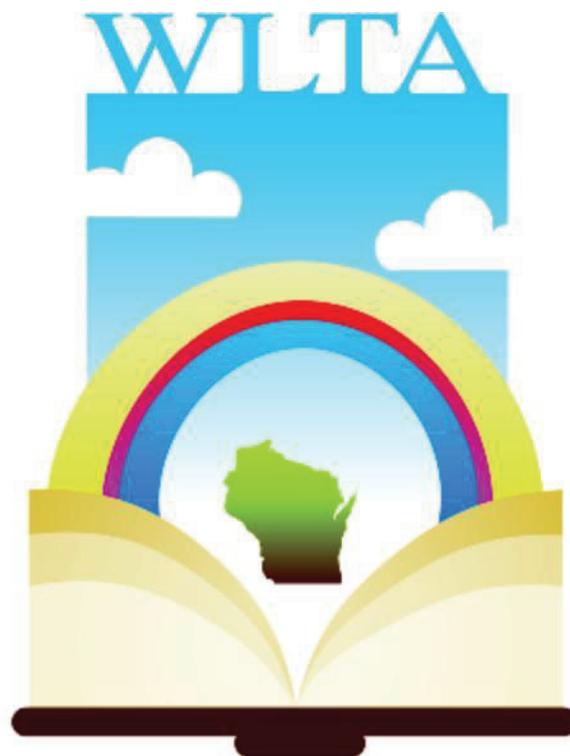
Of the more than 2,000 members of the Wisconsin Library Association (WLA), nearly 400 public library trustees find a home as part of the Wisconsin Library Trustees and Advocates (WLTA), a division of WLA. We're proud of that level of participation by those who help govern the libraries in this state. However, there are close to 2,000 public library trustees in Wisconsin, and WLA would be even stronger if a larger number of trustees would become members of WLA/WLTA. Not only would WLA benefit, but trustee members would reap many rewards.

Doug Lay, former chair of WLTA and currently the WLTA representative on the WLA Board, puts it this way. "A basic premise behind belonging to WLA is that individuals can become more effective locally if they are better informed about library developments taking place state-wide," Doug says. "By bringing like-minded people together, WLTA hopes to extend to all library promoters in Wisconsin expanded opportunities to exchange perspectives, pool intellectual resources and synthesize ideas."

For instance, WLTA provides opportunities to become better informed about a wide range of library issues by sponsoring programming at the annual WLA Conference. Special rates for library trustees and friends make it more economical to attend this 3 day event, which rotates around the state.

This fall's conference included sessions on promoting the library, recent legislation affecting libraries, library service to special populations, fundraising, running effective meetings, and creating sound policies. WLTA holds an annual meeting at the conference to give trustees a chance to gather in one place, and the informal opportunities to exchange ideas and information are just as valuable. WLTA also sponsors programs at the annual public library conference, which will be held May 2-4, 2007, at the Plaza Hotel in Eau Claire.

The WLTA website at <http://www.wla.lib.wi.us/wlta/> provides links to resources that can assist trustees with their governing responsibilities. It's a great place to connect with information on open meetings law, public records compliance, and DPI resources such as "Trustee Essentials," the comprehensive guide to trustee authority and responsibilities. Trustees can also link to a Legislative Status Report of all library-related funding and other bills currently pending before the state legislature. Thumbnails of the issue, WLA's position, and links to more detailed information are provided for each legislative issue.



The WLTA News is another way trustees stay connected and informed. You might learn about a new piece of legislation, a tip on advocating more effectively for your library, or how a library handles new trustee orientations. The quarterly WLA Newsletter is also provided to all WLTA members, keeping you informed about the activities of the entire association. WLA and WLTA also have e-mail discussion lists. The WLA list is a great way to get the latest legislative news, just as it happens.

For the sense of community, the educational opportunities, and the chance to advocate more effectively for libraries, WLTA membership makes a lot of sense. We hope you'll join WLA today and become part of the Wisconsin Library Trustees and Advocates.

To join or get more details about membership benefits, go to <http://www.wla.lib.wi.us/membership/>. Select the individual membership application form, print, complete the form and send to WLA with your annual dues of \$32. Or, contact the WLA office (608-245-3640 or wla@scls.lib.wi.us) to request a membership application or more information.

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What would you like every public library trustee to know?

- That libraries have critical funding issues on all levels.
- Be regular library users, and come in during the summer to see how busy we get.
- Don't be afraid to ask questions at the meetings. It's hard to know how well trustees understand some things.
- The Wisconsin Trustee Handbook from DPI is a terrific tool. Understanding it will help you do a good job.
- That a library can make a difference in someone's life.

Is there anything else you'd like to tell trustees?

- Thank you, thank you, thank you for supporting the library and staff.
- Please try to attend as many meetings as possible.
- Libraries are the heartbeat of communities and need all the support they can get!
- A librarian wears many hats. We are expected to be teachers, computer experts, babysitters, janitors, cooks, and the resident shrink.
- Be there for the library in your community, and be there for the community in your library.

TRUSTEE SOAPBOX

Do you have a question, comment or topic to suggest for a future TrusteeTale? Send an Email to Mark at: Arend@winnefox.org.

Editor/Author: Mark Arend
Graphic Artist: Renee Miller

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**Winnefox Library System
106 Washington Avenue
Oshkosh, WI 54901-4985**