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**Wisconsin Library Association Awards:
Celebrating Excellence in Library Service**

The Wisconsin Library Association is pleased to announce the following award recipients for 2006: *Library of the Year*, Fond du Lac Public Library; *Trustee of the Year*, Paul Kanter, trustee, Waukesha County Federated Library System; *WLA/Highsmith Award*, “Game Night at the South Madison Branch Library”; *Special Service Award*, Steve Hirsch, Executive Secretary, Public Records Board, State of Wisconsin Department of Administration; *Citation of Merit*, Mead Witter Foundation, Inc., Wisconsin Rapids; and *Muriel Fuller Award*, Mary Struckmeyer, Supervisor, Reference and Interlibrary Loan Unit, Reference and Loan Library.

In nominating Fond du Lac Public Library as the 2006 *Library of the Year*, Lois Potratz, director of the North Fond du Lac Public Library, says there is no single accomplishment which makes FDLPL deserving of this award. Rather, says Potratz, “It is the culture of creativity, collaboration, and proactive service that makes FDLPL the consummate community library.” Some of the library’s recent accomplishments which illustrate its customer-centered focus include:

- In February 2004, opening an inviting, technology-driven building.
- Establishing a “lucky day” collection of no-hold best sellers.
- Offering wireless Internet access.
- Launching “Fond du Lac Reads,” a community wide reading program.
- Setting circulation records in 2005 and 2006.

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- The “Busses to Books” campaign to provide free bus rides for kids to the library in the summers of 2005 and 2006.
- Providing leadership in technology including the adoption of RFID in 2006 and promotion of the electronic branch.
- Providing community leadership through its promotion of diversity, support for the visual arts and local artists, outreach to county residents, support for small libraries in the county, and partnering with community-based organizations.

Ken Hall, director of Fond du Lac Public Library, said, “There are many exemplary libraries in Wisconsin that might have received this award. We are honored that we should be selected by our peers as the Wisconsin Library of the year. I think it is a testament to the dedication of our staff, volunteers, and community partners to provide quality library service.”

Paul Kanter, trustee with the Waukesha County Federated Library System, is being honored as 2006 *Trustee of the Year*. Mr. Kantner has served on five separate Waukesha county committees for libraries since 2002, including chairing the Act 150 Strategic Planning Committee and the Waukesha County Library Governance Options Study Committee. Kanter balances his work for libraries with his professional duties as a U.S. Attorney and the chair of the Town of Delafield.

In supporting Kanter’s nomination, Waukesha County Board Chair James T. Dwyer called him “a true public servant” and said, “If he were fortunate enough to win this award I am sure he would give everyone else credit for his success.”

Kanter is recognized for his intellect, sense of humor, and leadership, including his ability to guide groups to consensus on potentially contentious issues. He understands the dynamics and responsibilities of board and committee service. He studies the information required by his leadership positions, vigorously discusses the issues, and publicly supports the group’s decision once reached – even if it is not his preferred position. Others who have served with him consider him one of the most influential leaders for libraries in Waukesha County.

The South Madison Branch of the Madison Public Library receives the 2006 *WLA/Highsmith Award* for “Game Night at the South Madison Branch.” Conceived by branch manager Chris Wagner and Youth Librarian Carolyn Forde in 2005, library staff as well as teen workers and volunteers from the neighborhood planned and implemented the after-hours Game Nights on Tuesdays beginning in June

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through early August. One young participant's anonymous evaluation card read, "If it was me and I was on the waiting list and you called me and said I could come, I would FLY to get there!"

On Game Night, the youth have many choices of activities, free from the constraints of the usual library rules: unlimited Internet access, a game computer, board or role-playing games, group games, art projects, and reading alone or in groups. When the pizza and snacks are served, library staff takes time to tell youth about books, movies or other library resources. Youth can check items out even though the library is "officially closed." In addition, special guests such as a local game store owner and theatre and art teachers give participants the personal, focused attention that they crave.

The library staff report that, partly due to Game Night, participation in the 2005 Summer Library Reading Program increased by more than 23 percent and completion of the program increased from 9.6 percent to 45 percent. (The figures for 2006 were not yet available.) Staff also report fewer incidents involving negative interaction with youth.

This past summer, cumulative attendance at the seven after-hours Game Nights was 208 youth spanning ages 10 to 16, but primarily middle schoolers. Sixty-five percent of the attendees were African-American, 10% were Hispanic, 10% Asian American, and 15% white.

The *WLA Special Service Award* is reserved for individuals of noteworthy achievement as evidenced by substantial activities and exceptional service to the library profession. The 2006 Special Service Award is presented to Steve Hirsch, Executive Secretary, Public Records Board, State of Wisconsin Department of Administration. Hirsch guided a committee of public librarians through the muddy waters of creating a record retention schedule for public libraries in Wisconsin.

Hirsch's knowledge of state records allowed the committee to use existing record models for state government, and he showed the group how those models extend to local government. Hirsch helped the committee evaluate each record series and come to consensus on the minimum retention period that would serve a library's needs. His expertise about Public Records Board procedures, as well as applicable state records laws and administrative rules, was invaluable as committee recommendations were sent to the Wisconsin Public Records Board for final approval.

In short, Hirsch was essential to the process of crafting a document to guide Wisconsin's 389 public libraries and 17 public library systems as to the retention of their non-active records.

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The Mead Witter Foundation, Inc., located in Wisconsin Rapids, receives the 2006 *Citation of Merit*. In 2006, the foundation distributed \$425,000 in noncompetitive grants to 65 public libraries in central and northern Wisconsin. The funding supported reference materials, circulating print materials, library furnishings for public use, computer equipment for public use, or special event programming and exhibits.

Lori Belongia, director of the Marshfield Public Library, which received one of the grants, said, "When an organization takes the initiative to make this type of financial commitment to support what you do, it has the warmth of a bracing arm around the shoulder. To say it another way, the money and what it can do is exciting, but acknowledgement of the value of libraries is even more encouraging."

Ron McCabe, director of McMillan Memorial Library in Wisconsin Rapids, noted that this is the second time that Mead Witter Foundation has offered such generosity to libraries in the region. In 1997-98, the Foundation provided \$394,400 to 57 public libraries. At that time, the Foundation was given the WLA Special Service Award under its previous name, Consolidated Papers Foundation.

The *Muriel Fuller Award* is given to a library professional or paraprofessional in recognition of outstanding accomplishments that have significantly improved and benefited library services. The 2006 winner is Mary Struckmeyer, Supervisor of the Reference and Interlibrary Loan Unit, Reference and Loan Library (RLL), Madison. Some would call her a modern-day Lutie Stearns, because like the woman whose traveling libraries are considered the predecessor of the RLL, she has a passion for providing equal access to patrons of all types and sizes of libraries in Wisconsin's rural and urban communities.

Fellow staff at RLL call her "the heart of the Reference and Loan Library." Struckmeyer has been a mentor and inspiration to others in the profession. She is lauded by many as an innovator and a leader who effectively promotes the resources of the RLL to librarians, state agencies, state employees, and school personnel. To supplement the RLL's resources, she has sought out subject experts and developed cooperative relationships with special libraries such as the Wisconsin Law Library, Ebling Health Sciences Library and other UW-Madison campus libraries. In addition, she was a leader in the development of the Wisconsin virtual reference consortium from its beginning in 2000.

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Ulrike Dieterle, Ebling Library, summarized the feelings of many others when she wrote of Struckmeyer, “She is the consummate librarian, a generous collaborator, with a positive attitude and a willingness to help whenever, wherever.”

WLA will present these award winners with a proclamation and plaque detailing their accomplishments at the 2006 WLA Annual Conference Awards Banquet on Thursday, November 2, at the Kalahari Resort and Convention Center, Wisconsin Dells. The winner of the WLA/Highsmith Award will receive a check for \$1,000 from Highsmith. In addition to contributions from DEMCO and Highsmith, the WLA Awards program is supported by the WLA Foundation, through individual charitable contributions.

Award nominations are reviewed by the WLA Awards and Honors Committee, which selects winners based on established criteria for each award. Committee members are Alice Sturzl, Chair; Dee Barabe; Roxane Bartelt; Gregory Crews; Kathi Jakuboski, and Mary Knapp.

The Wisconsin Library Association brings together and supports people from all types of libraries to advocate and work for the improvement and development of library and information services in the state. The awards program is one way the association acknowledges the dedication of its members to provide exemplary library service to the people of Wisconsin. For more information about WLA, go to <http://www.wla.lib.wi.us/>.

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