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From the Chair

I get off easily this time, as far as the “Note from the Chair” column is concerned. I don’t always get off so easily when I procrastinate, but this time is the exception. I’d like to express my thanks on behalf of the board to everyone who attended the WAPL conference! Special thanks go to Desiree Bongers, Bob Stack and the WLA staff, whose work behind the scenes made the conference informational, fun and a great experience. Look for information in future issues of *Communiqué* about next year’s conference, which will be held May 6-8, 2009, at the Wilderness Resort in Wisconsin Dells! See you there!

—by Rhonda Puntney, WAPL Chair

Keeping Up With the Jones’ or the Jetsons

The recent PLA Conference in Minneapolis was packed with vendors selling things like movie licenses and gaming equipment to libraries. It seems like these non-traditional library services are keeping us busier than ever. We are all trying to embark on the video game craze and using hip lingo to lure teens into our building. Hey, we know what “Super Smash Brothers Brawl” is all about and we play it too, what do you think—we’re square or something?? I just spent part of my recent holiday weekend at Best Buy picking up prizes for our summer reading program, which included iPod shuffles and a digital camera. I also stopped and picked up some Webkinz for the younger crowd. Heaven forbid we seem all about books. We seem to feel we have to keep up with what’s hip and trendy or patrons may not walk through our doors. Or are we just crazy?

At times I find myself longing to linger in the stacks and having some quality time with the book collection. I would love to have the time to help it grow, weed it, build it, define it and make it worthy of being called a “library,” which used to imply a sophisticated, quiet place that housed books. Instead, we end up devoting time away from the collection to spend it with technology—learning it, fixing it, cursing it, praising it—and we have less time to spend improving the book collection.

Techno-stress is now a part of our American vocabulary and people are turning to “life off the grid,” which sometimes sounds pretty appealing. A life of simple living with sustainable means has an allure I crave, especially when something goes wrong with some piece of technology in the building. Hey, if Barbara Kingsolver could do it, couldn’t I? But I do like a hot shower as much as the next person and it is impressive to see the way technology can improve our work. It’s just hard to keep up with all the gadgets and gizmos and still do library work. Working with books needs to become hip and trendy again so we can all get back to the heart and soul of librarianship.

However, I must admit I shouldn’t complain too much or be ungracious to all the good timesaving things technology has given us. Especially since I typed this article on my laptop while watching my son’s baseball game. Ah, simplicity.

—by Linda Pierschalla, WAPL Chair-Elect

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American Association of University Women's Annual Leader in Education Awards

The Geneva Lake Branch of the American Association of University Women celebrated its annual spring brunch on Saturday, May 10, at the beautiful home of Barbara Turner. One of the highlights was the presentation of our annual Leader in Education Awards to two extraordinary women in the Geneva Lake area.

This educational honor is presented to individuals who have demonstrated vision, inspiration and an outstanding contribution in their particular field. Nominations are made from our membership. Each of the award recipients receives, a certificate and a donation is made in their name to the Association of American University Women Educational Foundation.

The awards this year were presented to Andrea Peterson, Director of the Lake Geneva Public Library, and to Saskia Lodder, Program Coordinator of SANE (Sexual Assault Nurse Examiner) program at Lakeland Hospital.

Andrea Peterson was nominated by Chris Brookes for her stellar example of outreach to organizations and individuals throughout the area, emphasizing the library's role in the heart of our community. During her two years at the helm, the Lake Geneva Library has partnered with the Geneva Lakes Women's Association for a children's art exhibit; Geneva Lakes Area Museum for a book sale; Walworth County Literacy Council for tutoring; University of Wisconsin Extension preschool program for preschool classes; and Geneva Lakes Branch of American Association of University Women for a book discussion with Liam Callanan, author of *The Cloud Atlas*. In addition, the library expanded programming for people of all ages, including reading series for elementary and middle school children and a family movie night introduced by the Youth Services librarian. Adult programming included a Candidate Forum, Quilting Bee, Poems by the Lake and an architectural series. In expanding programming and increasing community connections, the Lake Geneva Public Library honors the past, serves the present and prepares for the future with Andrea Peterson's leadership.

Saskia Lodder was nominated by Lauren Pohn for being a tireless educator and advocate for children who are victims of sexual assault. Saskia Lodder is the program coordinator of SANE (Sexual Assault Nurse Examiner) program at Lakeland Hospital. She also serves as co-chair of Children's Court Advisory Board for Walworth County. The purpose of CCAB is to open communication and provide education and awareness to the public about the growing concerns of child maltreatment, child sexual assault and abuse, and to address concerns about sentencing criteria and the process of children going through the court system. For the past nineteen years, the Children's Court Advisory Board's most passionate dream has been to establish a Children's Advocacy Center. With the recent partnership with Children's Hospital in Milwaukee and a benefit at the Richard Driehaus Estate in Lake Geneva on May 31, the dream is becoming a reality. Saskia coordinated this benefit to raise money to fund a Child Advocacy Center in Walworth County. The theme of the fundraiser was *Joy to the World*, a song written by Hoyt Axton. Saskia Lodder is a compassionate and dedicated advocate for children in need in Walworth County. Her leadership and her efforts in these endeavors are making a difference for children now and in the future.

—by Andrea W. Peterson, Director, Lake Geneva Public Library

WAPL Conference

May 6-8, 2009
*Wilderness Resort,
Wisconsin Dells*

Communiqué

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WLA Foundation Funds Scholarships for 2008

WLA members and prospective students are encouraged to apply for the scholarships for library education and library continuing education sponsored by the Wisconsin Library Association Foundation. The six scholarships are funded by the WLA Foundation through generous charitable contributions. Applications are due September 15, 2008. Details on the scholarships and copies of the application forms are available by following the links on the scholarship website at <http://www.wla.lib.wi.us/scholarships/>.

LIBRARY EDUCATION SCHOLARSHIPS

- **Library Education Scholarship (\$1,300)**

Available to a current or permanent Wisconsin resident admitted to a master's degree program in library and information science or in library media at a Wisconsin school as a part- or full-time student.

- **Diversity Scholarship (\$1,200)**

Available to a current or permanent Wisconsin resident admitted to a master's degree program in library and information science or in library media at a Wisconsin school as a part- or full-time student and who is African-American, Latino/Hispanic, Asian/Pacific Islander, of Native American/Alaskan Native descent, or physically challenged.

- **Sally Davis Scholarship (\$1,250)**

Available to a current or permanent Wisconsin resident admitted to the master's degree program at the University of Wisconsin-Madison SLIS as a part- or full-time student.

- **Vida Cummins Stanton (\$1,400)**

Available to a current or permanent Wisconsin resident admitted to the master's degree program at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee SOIS as a part- or full-time student pursuing a library media or youth services program

LIBRARY CONTINUING EDUCATION SCHOLARSHIPS

- **George Bauer Continuing Education Scholarship (\$800)**

Available to a person employed in a library in Wisconsin, or someone who works with library employees in those communities, to attend a conference or other continuing education program within or outside Wisconsin.

- **Gloria Hoegh Scholarship for Rural Librarians (\$1,050)**

Available to a person employed in a library in a Wisconsin community with a population of 5,000 or less, or someone who works with library employees in those communities, to attend a conference or other continuing education program within or outside Wisconsin.

—by Peg Branson, WLA Scholarship Committee Chair

Initiate & Innovate 2008

Thank you to the public library personnel that helped contribute to the success of WLA Support Staff Section's one day conference, Initiate & Innovate in 2008, held May 21, 2008, at Waukesha County Technical College. One hundred sixteen people attended with 61 from public libraries. We hope to see you next year!

—Teresa Grimm, WLA SSS Secretary



FMLA and Working from Home

A few months ago I sent a query to Wispublib, at the request of my library board, stating that I was looking for library policies concerning the Family Medical Leave Act (FMLA), specifically maternity leave, which are more detailed than simply stating that the library follows the general guidelines for FMLA. I was also looking for policies that deal with staff working from home, and of special interest to me were any policies that addressed working from home while on leave.

I only received a few responses to my questions, which leads me to believe that there are not many policies like this in existence. The most relevant policy came from Jim Trojanowski at the Northern Waters Library System. Their policy addresses the possibility of staff working at home while recovering from a medical condition. The employee must describe, in writing, the work that will be performed and set up a schedule, and they must be available by telephone while they are to be working.

While this policy was helpful, after a series of meetings with my library board president, the city administrator and myself, the library board finally decided against crafting their own policy. Instead, the board decided to treat each FMLA request on a case-by-case basis and voted to allow me to work from home for up to 40 hours while I am on leave.

The main concern which needed to be dealt with, and which might be a factor in future FMLA requests, is the fact that I'm exempt. There was a question about paying me for only a few hours a week when I'm technically salaried. This issue was avoided because I will be able to use paid time off for my entire leave, having accrued enough sick and vacation leave. Given this, the board felt comfortable allowing me to work from home as well as come in one day a week during the second half of my leave. If I would have been taking any unpaid leave it is unlikely that they would have allowed me to do either of these.

Happily, the board approved my FMLA request exactly as I had originally proposed it and even though it took a long time to arrive at the conclusion, it was worth the effort. If you find yourself facing an FMLA request, either as an employer or employee, my advice is to educate yourself as much as possible and to make sure you allow enough time for the process to be completed before the leave is to begin.

—by *Desiree Bongers, Director, Ripon Public Library*

Musing on Customer Service

Remember David Spade on Saturday Night Live, when he played the flight attendant? He was able to say “good day” and “buh bye” in the most sarcastic tone that left us laughing. I've been thinking about why that bit was so funny. I think we could relate to it on two levels. One was that we have all encountered people in customer service positions that seem like they could care less about what they are doing. So David's portrayal of the uninterested flight attendant resonated with us. On another level, we all know the “high-maintenance” customers that take so much time. Watching David deftly say “buh bye” to some of them gave the audience a sense of what comes around, goes around!

What does this discussion have to do with libraries? Libraries are in the service of the public. Our challenge is to remain fresh, engaging and friendly, ESPECIALLY when we would like to say “buh bye” to our “favorite” patrons. Sustaining a positive attitude means recognizing that we need to work on it every day. First and foremost, I always like to remind myself that my patrons are my bread and butter. I like to employ humor with my patrons because when we are laughing together, the challenge of interaction diminishes. I tell myself that even if it is the tenth time I am answering the same question in a day, it is the FIRST time for that patron to ask that question. And, most of all, I believe in the golden rule—treat others as I wish to be treated.

—by *Elizabeth M. Timmins, Library Director, Muehl Public Library, Seymour, WI*

Jumpstart Your Library Career

Last fall as Rachel Singer Gordon was getting ready to launch her new discussion forums at LISjobs.com, she asked me to be a moderator and contribute to the boards. I thought this was a perfect opportunity to help the next generation of librarians achieve success in the workforce and to share some of the feedback and insights I've gathered over the past seven years I've been a professional librarian.

My first post was on ways to jumpstart your career in librarianship. People get stuck in ruts or can't get out of the gate properly, so I came up with five simple ways to achieve results.

1. Take charge of your career from day one of library school. Get involved (library associations, fieldwork/volunteer, student organizations) and network. If you wait until after graduate school to get serious about your career, you might find yourself afloat in choppy waters.
2. Market your skills. Ask yourself the question, “Am I marketing all my skills?” By asking yourself this question, you can start to inventory all your skills and discover some you might have overlooked. Build a portfolio of your skills that you can reference in your cover letter, resume and the interview. Use one or two keywords to keep track of your skills in your notes, and look for these same keywords (or similar traits) in job postings/invitations. Finding common ground in what the employer is looking for and the skills you possess will help build your self confidence about the opportunity right off the bat. Remember that it is not enough to mention that you possess a certain skill; you must be able to give examples that effectively market it.
3. Your attitude is the key. You should always strive for ways to improve your self confidence (see above.)
4. Find a mentor. A mentor is someone you can turn to for all kinds of advice, and be frank with at any time. A good mentor is willing to share knowledge and will play a part in your professional development. More importantly, they will lend an ear when you are encountering a challenge or having a bad day.
5. Be dynamic! I was at a friend's wedding last summer, and he pointed out one of his old college professors sitting at a dinner table. Since my friend and I both went to the same university, I wanted to introduce myself and catch up on the latest news at UW-Whitewater. We started to talk about the new chancellor at my alma matter, and he happened to mention he was on the hiring committee to hire this person. Intrigued, I asked the professor about the process. What separated the candidate who got the job from the others? “They all had the networking, fundraising, administrative skills and experience necessary for the job,” he said. “The candidate who ended up getting the job was dynamic! The way she greeted us (the hiring panel) and made us feel in the interview made all the difference.”

—by *Jess Bruckner, Kilbourn Public Library, Wisconsin Dells*



READING BETWEEN THE LINES

Alice Braun ran her slender hand lovingly over the glossy jacket on a new poetry book before sneaking a quick peek inside when nobody was looking. It was like sampling the green grapes at the grocery store. She couldn't afford to buy a whole bunch, but every once in awhile when she craved a taste she would eat one that was rolling around loose on the green mesh.

She used to enjoy her visits to the public library so much; the endless choices and feeling of ownership empowered her. Alice sighed as she slid the volume back onto the shelf. It was too thin and would never last until her next visit. She had only enough credits for two more books on the precious library debit card purchased with Christmas money from her daughter. This day she would select the fattest anthology she could find, and then pretend each short story was a separate title like the stacks of books she used to borrow.

It was those jokers at the state capitol, her brother Herb said; they did it. First they took all the sales tax money away from the cities and towns to fill the big budget hole they dug for themselves. Then, when libraries were about to fall off the tailgate of the pickup truck of local budget priorities, they changed public library law to replace "free" with "fee." Permissive legislation they called it, creating a new revenue stream. You don't have to charge, they said. Though library boards resisted at first, most soon had no alternative.

Herb used to stroll to his village library and borrow books from all over the state on interlibrary loan, but it was too small to produce enough transactions to be cost effective and closed. Interloans were expensive and people got a better deal at the big city library.

"You're lucky you still have a library," Herb said, "even if you are paying twice."

Alice knew the librarians were uncomfortable with the fees. Debit cards discounted the \$3.00 flat rate per item paid by borrowers with minimum privileges. Permanent library cards carried a variable annual fee depending upon which service plan was selected. Only a lucky few could afford an unlimited family card.

Sometimes they offered coupon specials. Borrow one and get one free. Receive one children's program pass or movie voucher with the rental of ten picture books. Swap a used paperback in good condition for 30 free minutes of computer time.

Alice wondered about low-income families with young children. Were students whose parents couldn't afford a home computer or were otherwise unable to buy their information getting poorer grades? What about folks needing new job skills, consumer information or how-to books?

She had noticed the librarians were now stocking what "sold" instead of more expensive reference tools and books that appealed to the tastes of fewer borrowers. Soon the public library would no longer be a repository of all points of view. Was that what the government intended?

The grim little parable you just read was originally written for my weekly newspaper column six years ago when the threat to free library access was very real. In the wee hours of March 15, 2002, the Wisconsin Assembly passed its version of the Budget Reform Bill on a 51 to 48 vote. Included was this provision inserted by majority Republicans: "Repeal the current law requirement that municipal libraries, consolidated county libraries and county library services shall be free for the use of inhabitants of the municipality or county by which it is established and maintained, subject to reasonable regulations prescribed by the library's board."

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Reading Between the Lines *cont.*

That effort to scuttle Wisconsin's 1872 free public library law failed to find support on the Senate floor. Striking the onerous provision was among the first things agreed upon by the conference committee hammering out a budget reform package. Legislators were undoubtedly influenced by a deluge of outraged citizen letters from all corners of the state.

Lest you think the "fee vs. free" debate was a partisan affair, recall that the massive public outcry of 2002 did not deter Democratic Representative Shirley Krug from proposing in November 2003 that the Milwaukee Co. Federated Library System be allowed to charge patrons who checked out videos, DVDs and CDs, and other things "used in an entertainment vein."

"Even though many of those things are popular," Krug acknowledged, "they are more about entertainment than education. If I want to rent 'Terminator 5,' I don't see why a fellow taxpayer should pay for it for me." The assemblywoman was also quoted by the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel as saying "some Milwaukee residents don't have VCRs or DVD players. They may not even have a CD player. They don't have to subsidize someone who does with their property taxes."

Did it then follow that property owners with insufficient vision to read traditional print sources should resent their property taxes subsidizing all who can? Or taxpayers without children should balk at their tax dollars benefitting families who value youth services? Or library users without an investment portfolio should protest subsidizing a library subscription to Value Line? Or taxpayers without a car might take exception to purchasing library copies of Chilton's auto repair manuals for those who know a carburetor from a fuel pump and how to get a wrench on them?

Five years ago, a group of our colleagues from the Fox Valley responded to Krug, in part: "CD and DVD players are hardly the exclusive provinces of the wealthy. Both are available quite cheaply; many are owned by the formerly employed, who now have less ability to buy or rent titles. Books on tape and CD are heavily used by the elderly, the illiterate, the visually impaired, the dyslexic and those whose jobs require a lot of time on the road. Their right to access information and ideas should be no less than others. There's more than one kind of literacy: reading skills are essential, but cultural literacy is also vital. Films and music are as much a part of the fabric of our society as are novels. We're willing to make our share of hard decisions, despite increasing use of our services. But to make access to certain ideas and information available on the basis of ability to pay is not in the interests of a free society. It is simply wrong."

It's still wrong. As I write this in early May 2008, the WLA list serv is discussing a column by Christian Schneider, a "free market" wit from southeastern Wisconsin with a few pithy opinions about investing tax dollars in library multi-media collections that provide "no-cost materials to free-riding wealthy people looking for some free entertainment." The poor, disabled and elderly are identified by Schneider as "truly needy" and therefore worthy of free "basic public service" provided by public libraries founded to provide educational literature "for those of modest means." However, he takes issue with universal library card entrée to "a wide variety of music CDs, DVD movies, video games and internet access, all for free, and all at taxpayer expense." In Schneider's world, the ability to afford entertainment is an earned privilege.

The "free" in free public libraries isn't about cost or content, but about free and equal access to ideas and information in all formats regardless of one's income or location. While the means by which each public library realizes its annual operating budget is complex, shared community investment in what Andrew Carnegie called "the people's university" allows everyone to take equal advantage of our services.

The "free" in free public libraries is all about freedom and must not be taken for granted.

—by Kris Adams Wendt, Rhinelander District Library