

trustee tale

Newsletter for Public Library Trustees

How to be an Advocate for your Library

By Mark Arend, assistant director, Winnefox Library System.

Advocacy is one of the most important things a trustee does. Advocacy is a fancy word for being an active, vocal supporter and promoter of the library. In September library trustees from the Winnefox & OWLS systems attended a presentation on advocacy by Pat Wagner, a nationally-known trainer. Here are some nuggets digested from her program.

1. Advocacy is what you do every day. It isn't a special occasion thing; you are an advocate for the library at the grocery store, the school program, and the service club lunch as well as at the village board or city council meeting.

2. You sound like an advocate: You practice saying the facts and figures out loud, even if there is still a crib sheet in your pocket.

3. You behave like an advocate: You speak for the library in the context of the better future of the community and state you serve.

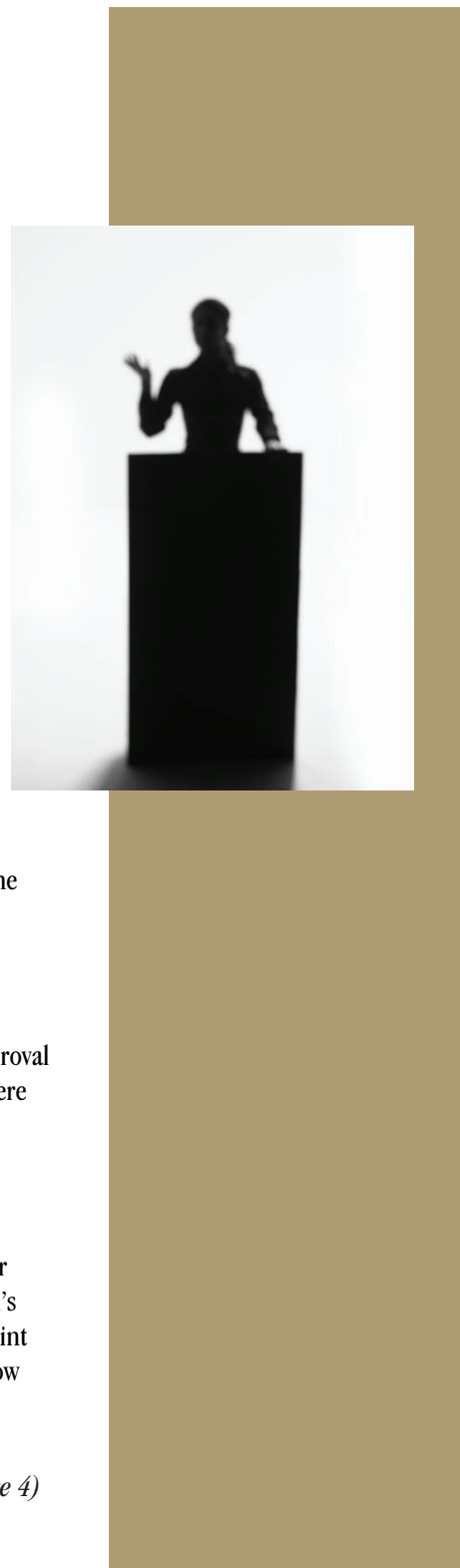
4. You build the well before you are thirsty. You build relationships before you need them and you recruit more advocates all the time. Just as the time to fix the roof is before it rains the time to build relationships with elected officials and library supporters is before you need them.

5. You are gracious in victory and in defeat. Whether you win or lose you're in this for the long haul and there will be other battles to fight in the future. There's a chance that this year's opponent may be next year's supporter. And graciousness shows that you're a class act.

6. You keep your message consistent with other advocates. When you have a well-defined goal—approval of a building program or passage of a library levy—there will be less confusion if all supporters send the same message.

7. You learn the selling points of each person, before you speak Everyone supports the library for different reasons. One person may value the children's programming, another your home delivery of large print books. You can be a more effective advocate if you know the interests of the person you're talking to.

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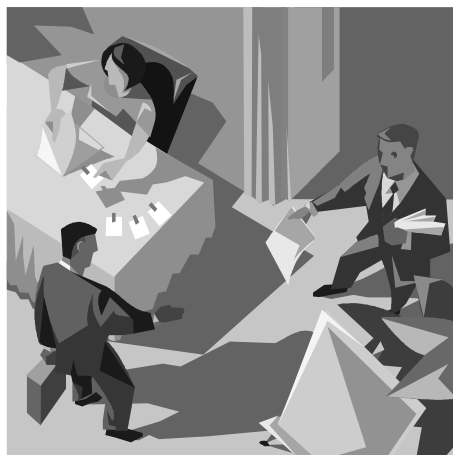
Making Connections: the 2006 Wisconsin Library Association Annual Conference

Connect with other library trustees at this year's annual WLA conference at the Kalahari Resort and Convention Center in Wisconsin Dells, October 31 to November 3.

You'll find a wonderful line up of over 60 programs, scintillating speakers and several special events sponsored by the Wisconsin Library Association and the Wisconsin Health Science Library Association.

Ask your library director for more information, or go to the WLA site <http://www.wla.lib.wi.us/>

Plan to attend now!



Advice from Library Trustees and Directors, part 1

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 Trustees; the directors' comments will be reported in the next issue of *Trustee Tales*. I'm sure you'll find the comments to be self-explanatory.

What is the best thing about the library board you're on?

- We all really care about the library and the staff.
- We try to make decisions in the library's best interest and be fiscally responsible.
- The opportunity to serve the residents of this area to help maintain a quality Library program for our patrons.
- We have a time schedule, and meetings seldom last longer than an hour.
- We are very well-organized. We always get things done in an efficient manner.
- All members participate and respect each other.
- We all consider the library a treasure of our community and take our positions seriously.
- Its ability to support our excellent library and library staff for our community.
- A strong shared commitment to the library and a shared respect of the staff and each other.

What drives you crazy about your library board?

- We are too political and too polite, when we should be damning the torpedoes as advocates on all political levels – extremists on behalf of readers.
- Members who do not take advantage of all the wonderful programming our library offers.

- Members who don't do their homework in preparation for a meeting or in preparation for tackling a difficult issue.

What could/should your library director be doing to help the board do a better job?

- Nothing more—our director is super! The director does a great job of educating us and keeping us informed.
- Our director could facilitate the communication between the library staff and the board more efficiently to better help the board understand the issues.
- The director should provide a clear picture of what resources are needed to operate an excellent library, not just what is expedient. Regardless of the current financial environment the director needs to be explicit about the impact of cuts on patrons and the potential for growth.
- No complaints. Communication is the key, and it's always helpful that the director provides us with information prior to the meeting.

What advice would you give to other library trustees?

- Use the library regularly. Visit other libraries.
- Ask questions and ask more questions until you understand.
- Respect everyone, participate, and take interest in the library's daily activities.
- Have well-organized meetings with a time schedule. Follow the agenda and don't allow people to chit chat or beat a dead horse. The president must take charge and get everyone involved. Be careful so no one person dominates the meeting.
- Read and refer to the Trustees Essentials. It is very helpful!
- Agree to serve on the Board because you really want to support a quality Library program and are willing to commit the time needed to do so. Go beyond a one issue reason for getting appointed.
- Read/listen to news regarding libraries locally and nationally, and keep abreast of legislation which governs and funds those libraries.
- In making decisions, stay open minded and try to think of all the issues that could affect the situation.

What advice would you give to library directors about dealing with boards of trustees?

- Give them all the information they need to make informed decisions.
- Make sure that Board members never have the opportunity to say "you never told us about that". Keep your trustees informed.
- We are a TEAM. Show appreciation. Be enthusiastic and love what you are doing – attitudes are contagious.

- Talk about all the good things, and work in suggestions for improvement.
- Don't assume trustees know the inner workings of a library. Lots of explanation is helpful.
- Communication is very important, and more communication is better.
- Get on the phone and let us know when you need a champion.

Is there anything else you'd like to share?

- Technology has been embraced by librarians and utilized to enhance service. However, I don't want to lose books. I don't want to lose the place where people are reading, writing or studying. Let's not lose the thing that has served as the heart of every community during all the years in American history.
- I feel we have the best library director in the state! The director is smart, kind, organized and very energetic. This rubs off on the rest of the staff as well. Each and every patron is made to feel very welcome in our library.
- After many years on the Board I have found the experience to be very rewarding. I've always hoped that my contribution would help to maintain one of the most valuable programs a community has to offer – the Library. I've just wanted to help where and when I can. I hope I have.
- **I enjoy serving on the library board!**



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8. You assume positive intention and avoid benign contempt.

It's easy to assume that because someone opposes the library's building plan they are somehow a stupid, ill-informed, or outright bad person. This is generally not true, and if you attempt to meet them with an open mind and understand their reasoning you may be able to find some common ground.



9. You behave with honor and courtesy in public and private.

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