



# Trustee Update

## Library News You Can Use

Start now for 2013 budget cycle

### Library funding cuts demand advocacy efforts

Attacks on libraries and library funding continue in Wisconsin and across the country. The loss of Maintenance of Effort, levy limits of 0%, and a continued weakened economy are contributing to a decrease in library appropriations, which is likely to continue in coming years before it gets better.

If your local appropriation is reduced this year, and again next year, and again... What can you do? Some library directors and library boards may say, "There's nothing we can do. There's only so much money." But please stop and think—there is actually plenty you can, and *should* do.

We need to be proactive in support of adequate library funding, marshalling our efforts to send a clear message to funding bodies that libraries are too vital to cut. We must re-prioritize our efforts and focus every library supporter on activities that will have the greatest long-term impact. For example, conducting a book sale in good economic times to raise a few extra dollars may be a reasonable use of time. But when budgets at the state, county and local levels are being slashed, raising a few dollars through a book sale will have little impact on the library's long-term viability in the community. The time spent on those smaller fundraising projects could be better

spent on a coordinated campaign to contact elected officials to argue for more public funding. It's time for library supporters to stand up—and speak up—for the public institutions they value. Library trustees are a logical and potentially powerful voice in support of libraries. If each trustee invites one or two additional library supporters to speak up, the positive impact could be tremendous.

We often hear library directors and trustees say that libraries shouldn't take groups of supporters to city council or county board meetings because "you'll only make them mad." Should they be mad because those who elected them are coming to request adequate funding for a service that benefits everyone equally? Isn't that how our system is supposed to work? There is no better sign of support than to bring a large number of people to a public budget meeting. They don't have to say anything if it is understood they are there in support of the library. This show of support cannot be created or maintained by SCLS staff. To be effective, it must come from within the community and be viewed as a local cause.

Look around your library. Think of the people you help every day, who are happy the library exists, and would be negatively affected if you had to cut hours, services, or staff.

Consider asking your supporters to help make the case for the library's budget. Educate them about the services you provide, the cost of providing them, and how much busier the library is because of the slow economy. You may also want to explain how the library helps people look for jobs, write resumes, apply for scholarships, and all the other assistance the library provides to the community during the economic downturn. You may want to share research showing that children who read over the summer return to school without any reduction in their reading skills. Include whatever arguments you feel



### WLA memberships, System Celebration cut

For many years, SCLS paid WLA membership dues for interested trustees on local library boards and county library boards. Unfortunately, a reduction in state funding means this service had to be eliminated. We will no longer pay for trustees' WLA memberships.

Despite this unfortunate turn of events, we do still encourage you to consider becoming a member of WLA. Although the collective payment became a rather large sum for SCLS, on an individual basis trustee dues are quite reasonable. Annual dues for trustees are only \$32, and the benefits of your membership are significant:

- ✓ Be part of something bigger! Support the profession and a worthy cause. Your dues payment is WLA's most important source of financial support, and having a large membership boosts WLA's credibility with elected officials and others who affect libraries and the profession.

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—please see Library funding on page 2

**Library funding**—from page 1 will resonate with your local municipality’s elected officials, and of course remind them to be respectful. If you have prepared them well, when the time comes for consideration of the budget these people will be able to say: “The library is a valuable investment in the future of the community, and the future of our children, and I’m willing to pay for it with my taxes.”

When the economy rebounds, you won’t be able to go back and purchase all the materials you couldn’t purchase when your funding was woefully inadequate. You can never go back and help those children whose school progress was impaired because you had to stop offering summer reading programs. You can’t go back and help those people who never found a job because you didn’t have enough computers for them to work on their resume and apply for jobs online. This is a community issue, a quality of life issue, and one that is every bit as essential as fire and police protection.

If you’re interested in expanding your local library advocacy efforts, turn to SCLS for assistance. We can help you devise strategy, craft messages, develop materials, and provide access to the local names on our Speak Up list. ❖

## **WLA memberships**—from page 1

- ✓ Enhances your legislative knowledge and advocacy skills, and help support initiatives to improve library service and funding in Wisconsin.
- ✓ Connect with library professionals and other leaders. Use these connections to help solve day-to-day challenges and celebrate successes.
- ✓ Take advantage of leadership and education opportunities, including WLA and unit conferences.

Other changes we made to manage the state's 10% reduction in Public Library System Aid include:

- ✓ no pay increases for staff;
- ✓ staff will pay a larger share of health insurance and retirement benefits;
- ✓ some layoffs, and other positions left vacant;
- ✓ System Celebration cancelled. ❖

## **SCLS staff contacts:**

For information about library budgets contact Cheryl Becker at (608) 246-7973 or [cbecker@scls.lib.wi.us](mailto:cbecker@scls.lib.wi.us).

If you have questions about library advocacy contact Mark Ibach at (608) 246-5612 or [mibach@scls.lib.wi.us](mailto:mibach@scls.lib.wi.us). ❖

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