

## **Collaborations Enable “Endless Possibilities!”**

Embedded in the three library articles that have appeared under this series heading so far is an underlying message about the value, even necessity, of collaborations and partnerships.

Among Westmoreland Library Network™ (WLN) collaborations and partners that have already been mentioned are:

- About 450 statewide public libraries, organized in 29 Districts, WLN being one of them, with one cohesive voice under the PA Department of Education, Office of Commonwealth Libraries, and one set of rules (as articulated in the PA Library Code)
- Office of the County Commissioners (evidenced by its two appointees to the seven-member WLN Board of Directors)
- WLN itself as an administrative entity, with its 22 member public libraries (and three branches) from across the whole of Westmoreland County (and their own collaborators and partners, such as, in the case of Murrysville Community Library: the Municipality of Murrysville and the Murrysville Community Library Foundation, about which more will be said at another time)
- WLN itself as a service entity, with its Polaris® Integrated Library System (ILS) and van distribution function, both centrally headquartered at Green Forge campus in Greensburg (and there maintained and upgraded by a core staff)

It is not unimportant that the vast majority of WLN headquarters’ annual funding for operating expenses comes from the first two.

Not previously mentioned are special ongoing collaborations with:

- American Association of University Women (AAUW Murrysville Area branch)
- Allegheny Intermediate Unit 3 Math & Science Collaborative (AIU3 MSC)

The local AAUW branch organizes and conducts high quality and topical adult/young adult programming at, and in collaboration with, the Murrysville Community Library (MCL), which is free and open to the public. In this COVID-19 era of controlled human contact, this activity is, like the annual Book Sale that AAUW also conducts for MCL’s benefit, on hiatus until 2021 at the earliest.

The AIU3 MSC (<https://www.aiu3.net/Page/34>) “is a program of the Allegheny Intermediate Unit that focuses on STEM (Science/Technology/Engineering/Mathematics) education. The MSC brings innovative and effective approaches in curriculum and instruction to the region, preparing educators to support all students for work and career in the 21st century.”

The AIU3 MSC, prior to 2014, had never worked with informal educators such as librarians, only with school educators. In 2014, the MCL formed a founding partnership

**Published in the Penn-Franklin News August 26, 2020: “The Magic Library Card!”**

with it, which one year later became a partnership across the whole Westmoreland Library Network. The formative two-year funding support came from Community Foundation of Westmoreland County (The Pittsburgh Foundation). It was overlapped by sustaining funding from the National Science Foundation in that early stage.

Under the leadership of Gabriela Rose, MSC Math Coordinator, and others at the AIU3 MSC, the goal was professional development of library staff for the purposes of achieving effective, PA standards-based, age-specific, informal STEM learning for preK-4 children in a reading environment. The focus was on STEM-enrichment of the Summer Reading Club experience.

By 2015, the project, and its product, had its own name: Storytime STEM-packs™ (<https://storytimestem.com/pages/about-us>). Overall, it is quite a success story, with eventual participation, along with library staff, from over 50 School Districts and parochial schools, and about 60 Head Start Allegheny County classrooms.

Professional development continues into the present time, made possible along the way by additional funding from PPG Industries, Inc. and the Eden Hall Foundation, and most recently by a Governor’s office PASmart Advancing Grant 2019-20. Not surprisingly, more of the professional development is done now by virtual interaction than it was early on in the project, but that was intended in any case.

The WLN and Murrysville Community Library have benefited greatly from these collaborations, which are essential in this modern age. But our most essential collaboration is with you, the public, the real benefactor, our reason to keep the library vibrant and engaged!

Charles B. Greenberg  
WLN Board President