

Weaving with Themes

When we started this The Magic Library Card! series of articles about the public libraries of Westmoreland County in the August 5 issue of this newspaper, it was with multiple purposes. We had more than just a commonplace goal of telling you heartwarming stories about the Westmoreland Library Network™ and its 22 member libraries, but that too. There were previously untold themes, deep within the library operations gearbox, to weave into the articles, things to say to you readers about the sophistication and stature of public libraries, things you didn't know. So, here, to help you and me to collect our thoughts, are eight themes plainly said, all in one article. Some of you may have missed some of them if you have been only a sporadic reader.

- Elevation of the image of WLN libraries from traditional and age-old standing as just lenders of dusty books, supported by cookie-sale fundraisers, to the complex, modern, non-profit corporations that they are, with sophisticated and multifaceted governance, modern technology, multimedia products, and effective cross-discipline collaborations.
- Telling that story in the context of being members of a large community of educators, working, both schools and libraries alike, under the PA Department of Education (Office of Commonwealth Libraries in our case, overseeing about 450 public libraries).
- Getting readers to distinguish informed and standards-based informal learning (libraries) on the one hand from formal, standards-based learning (schools) on the other, and how they complement one another.
- Raising awareness for all of the above with staff, WLN Board Directors and member Board Trustees, and patrons.
- Making STEM learning a part of the expectation for library service: Storytime STEM-packs™, Power Library for youth science fairs, and TechNook 365 being pieces of that story.
- Highlighting the very high value of diverse collaborations and the absolute necessity for them. The WLN is itself a collaboration of 22 public libraries, in turn collaborating as one of 29 Districts under the PA Department of Education. Its libraries collaborate with School Districts. Its STEM initiatives have been made possible by working with the Allegheny Intermediate Unit Math & Science Collaborative and the Carnegie Science Center. Its Arts programming by working, for example, with the Westmoreland Symphony and the Pittsburgh Ballet Theater.
- Encouraging, by bringing these underlying library operations to light, qualified and diverse volunteers to serve on Boards of governance, as well as on committees that support them. Volunteers are not in great supply.
- And lastly, and so importantly, implicitly encouraging better fundraising strategies and outcomes based on knowing. How important it is to just know!

From the perspective of this overview, this moment to take a deep breath, I intend, after a very personal story to come next week about one small branch library that so impacted me, to talk to you the staff, and you the Board Trustee/Director, and you the patrons, about exciting New Product Development opportunities at public libraries, just

Published in the Penn-Franklin News on November 4, 2020.

waiting to be brought to light. I will do that in the context of TechNook 365, which was introduced to you in article #9 on October 7. If you want to bone up before then you can find all the archived, preceding articles on the WLN web site (<https://www.wlnonline.org/2020/10/08/westmoreland-libraries-featured-in-series-of-articles/>), or on the web site of Murrysville Community Library (<https://www.murrysvillelibrary.org/about-us/the-magic-library-card-series/>). While you are on site, please feel free to browse, and thank you for staying with me on this fun journey. And, Thank You! the Penn-Franklin News for both being a Corporate Sponsor and making all this possible.

Charles B. Greenberg
WLN Board President