Tales from a New Trustee

BY DAVE HARGETT

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From Library Patron to Library Trustee

The voice of the Board President rang out: "Motion made and seconded. Roll call vote, please!"

The recording secretary started the roll call: "Trustee Hargett?" she asked.

I looked down at the board packet in front of me, carefully considering the question before us. "How quickly this all happened," I thought; my mind flashed back to my first steps toward becoming a library Trustee.

I had always been an active volunteer, serving in several leadership positions over the years. After retiring from a 30-year career with a national retailer, I began looking around to see where else I might be able to help. Most of my outreach had been in sleep apnea; I have served as National Chairman of the American Sleep Apnea Association. Having lived 30 years in Bolingbrook, it was time to do something for my local community.

As a library supporter, I decided being a library Trustee might be a good thing to do. (Let me tell you, I didn't have a clue about how much work it would be or even how fulfilling it would be.) I sought an appointment to a vacancy in 2005, but didn't get it. I kept going to board meetings to learn more. I ran (unsuccessfully) in 2007, coming in third in a race for two board seats, but I continued going to meetings. The Board was considering a new building and I was very much in support of that goal. Late in 2007, I agreed to chair a citizen's group to advocate a yes vote on a bond referendum to build that new library.

The election was in early February 2008. We ran the campaign in the middle of a cold winter on a very limited budget, with active opposition. On election night, unofficial figures showed we lost by just a few votes, and I was greatly disappointed, frustrated, and even mad at myself for not working hard enough.

A few days later, a local paper reported one of the library Trustees was moving out of state. This was a surprise! I immediately submitted my resume and application to the Board President. I wanted to be first in line when they solicited applications for interviews.

Two weeks later the official canvass of the election results were posted. Another surprise! After counting absentee and other uncounted ballots, the referendum passed! The new building was on! The good news came out on Tuesday. I was asked to attend the Board Meeting on Thursday of that week, along with my wife. I thought I might get a public "Thank you" for my efforts for the referendum, but that wasn't quite what happened.

Early in the board meeting, the board accepted the resignation of the board member who was moving, and thanked him for his five years of service. Then the Board quickly discussed the vacancy, nominated me based on my long time interest and my efforts for the referendum, and voted on my appointment. A minute or two later I stood up front, being sworn in to fill the unexpired term.

I sat down amidst applause and words of congratulations. I was now a member of the board of Fountaindale Public Library District. I was actually a library Trustee! After two-and-a-half years of trying to get on the board, it finally happened. I considered that a very nice "Thank you."

For the next few moments, I was in sort of a daze, looking around the room, and then I began to listen to the discussion. I looked down at the board packet in front of me – at least I knew it was a board packet – but I hadn't seen the material until just now. I hurriedly turned the pages to find the information on the agenda item that was being considered. "Good thing I'm a speed reader, and good thing I've been to enough board meetings that I know what's happening," I thought.

However, I was still startled a bit, when I realized that I was being asked to be the very first Trustee to vote on the issue. "Give me a break," I thought to myself, "I've only been on the board for two minutes and you want me to vote already?"

"Trustee Hargett?" the secretary repeated.

I looked up at the audience, took a deep breath and after careful consideration, proudly said "Yes."

My first vote had been made and the rest of the board members made it unanimous. After all, we were just approving the Bills Payable Report!

Dave Hargett is still relatively new to being a library Trustee, but he's full of passion about the role. His public library district is very active, and his first 18 months as a Trustee have been quite busy. He is currently the Vice-President of Fountaindale Public Library District in Bolingbrook, Ill. He serves as a Trustee of the Prairie Area Library System (PALS) in northwest and north central Illinois. He also serves as ALTAFF's Web Site Committee Chair and as a member of the ALA Web Site Advisory Committee. With this column, Dave Hargett begins a regular series – "Tales from a New Trustee." His goal is to both educate and entertain as he shares his library experiences as a new Trustee, including successes, failures and mistakes. The next column will focus on the general process of becoming a library Trustee. Send any questions or comments to altaff@ala.org, to be forwarded to Dave Hargett.