President's Award 2020

This series has been all about the extraordinary services and accomplishments at WLN public libraries. So, now I would like to speak about and give a 2020 award for one particular extraordinary accomplishment.

Corporations will sometimes give President's Awards or something akin in name for exceptionally high achievement in product or process development. My longtime corporation of employment does, and I have a fair amount of knowledge about how that works for at least this one corporation. So, as the actual President of the Westmoreland Library Network, I am going to empower myself to define the attributes of a WLN President's Award, and then name the first-ever, from my own perspective only.

The President's Award candidate shall: (1) advance service to patrons in a profound and transformative way; (2) either serve the whole WLN community or be easily transferable one to another; (3) preferably, but not necessarily, represent a significant take-out of cost; (4) be durable over time.

The Polaris Integrated Library System (ILS) was a big step forward in its own time when launched in December 2007. It connected 20 WLN libraries at the time to provide a common and shared book et al. collection across the county, accessible by patrons 24/7. Hardware and software have been upgraded periodically, just as one might expect, sometimes at the direction and schooling of the provider. In the last four years, it and associated technological services have been taken to another level with the **Technology Infrastructure Upgrade** project, an overall quantum leap, at the initiative of the WLN itself, and made possible by a total of $1,350,000 of grants (as mentioned previously).

Obtaining grants to promote such a large and forward-thinking vision is always a high accomplishment in itself, for which support we humbly again thank the givers, and now honor the getters.

Here are the highlight features of our honored, quantum Technology Infrastructure Upgrade project: (1) standardization of member libraries' technology infrastructure, site to site, resulting in IT service to member libraries being dramatically improved; (2) upgraded wiring and equipment at each site that meets modern standards for Internet service; (3) a second full-time IT support professional to facilitate maintenance from the centralized headquarters location; (4) free cloud backup; (5) centralized web filtering and antivirus protection; (6) with all of this, saving thousands of outside-vendor service dollars for technical support; (7) elevation of service to patrons; (8) the sum of these Technology Infrastructure Upgrades positioning the WLN to install fiber optic Internet with much increased speeds, and much improved Wi-Fi connectivity (all previously described already in The Magic Library Card! of October 21, and archived at https://www.wlnonline.org).

It is this last culminating achievement that unequivocally makes the Technology Infrastructure Upgrade project the deserved winner of this year's WLN President's Award. Eighteen library sites are fiber-connected as of this writing, with seven more scheduled to be completed by early next year. And, at this writing, all participating library sites but one are now also equipped with extended reach for patron Wi-Fi service well beyond the exterior walls of the library itself.

The core drivers and implementers for this major achievement are: Cesare Muccari, WLN Executive Director; Joseph Fee, IT Manager; and Kenneth O'Toole, IT Support Technician. Why now does their foresight and implementation especially matter? Because COVID-19 has accelerated an otherwise steady, pre-COVID trend towards on-line patron service into a rush towards it. They and the rest of the WLN staff are to be applauded and congratulated for their vision and hard work in implementing the Technology Infrastructure Upgrade project, including being prepared for COVID-19. Please join me in celebrating their achievement, and do enjoy the benefits as patrons of the WLN and its 22 public library members.

Charles B. Greenberg,
WLN Board President