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My “Elevator Pitch” for Libraries

On August 11, 2022, Susan Long, President of the Board of Trustees of the Murrysville Community Library (MCL), convened a virtual retreat for that Board and Library Director Amy Riegner. In addition to being a Board Director for the MCL Foundation, from which perspective I often write this column, I am also a MCL Board Trustee. Today, I tilt to the latter perspective, though there is a considerable Venn Diagram overlap.

The retreat was sponsored by the PA Department of Education’s Office of Commonwealth Libraries, funded by the Institute of Museum and Library Services, and facilitated by a team that included: consultant Barb Bickford of Bickford Collaboration; Jessica Miller, Fredricksen Library Director; and York County Libraries’ Director of Administration, John Miller. Only ten Libraries in PA were given this retreat opportunity. The purpose of the retreat was: “To gain clarity about the roles and behaviors of effective governing boards as we build a stronger board and a stronger library.” The desired outcomes were: (1) “Understanding the cycle for recruitment and succession planning and how we might apply it”; (2) “Building skills for community connections.”

One of the big affirmations for me is that, to meet the purpose and outcomes, each Board Trustee must have what is commonly called an “elevator pitch,” one that truly expresses why she/he is on the Board in the first place, and then why you the reader might want to be.

Each Trustee, of course, has her/his own experiential elevator pitch, which, by the way, is defined as “a succinct and persuasive sales pitch” in my MacBook Pro dictionary. By now, I am sure that you have come to realize that each of my The Magic Library Card! essays is an elevator pitch, although perhaps failing at being truly succinct.

I do have a more succinct personal elevator pitch and a civic one. I have expressed both before here in some way, more than once.

The personal elevator pitch goes like this: I am the product of blue collar parents who never graduated from high school. I grew up in a very rough neighborhood, whose crown jewel, right on my block, was the Linden Public Library, Chandler Avenue Branch. My father never used it, nor read anything but the Morning Racing Form, like most adult males I knew. My mother and I did. It was my early path to something much better in life, and that is what every Library is for everyone. Even if you only buy books for yourself, know that others need your hometown Library, so help make it strong.

The civics elevator speech follows directly and comes right from Thomas Jefferson: “If a nation expects to be ignorant and free in a state of civilization, it expects what never was and never will be. An informed citizenry is at the heart of a dynamic democracy.” There is nothing about sustaining a democracy that I need add to that, but David McCullough did add something about happiness: “As much as anything it meant the life of the mind and spirit. It meant education and the love of learning, the freedom to think

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for oneself.” If you truly care about keeping the republic, as Benjamin Franklin put it, then keeping public Libraries healthy and vibrant is as much a priority as any.

I hope that I have “elevated” you on both counts, personal and civic.

Charles B. Greenberg
Board Trustee, Murrysville Community Library