

Published in the Penn-Franklin News on January 4, 2023.

Denni's Legacy!

Delmont Public Library (DPL) is a small Library, with a small WLN service area, even in a Westmoreland Library Network whose Libraries are all thought small. Yet, because of what DPL has accomplished, hitting above its weight so to speak, it stands out among peers. And that is in no small way due to the leadership of the Board of Trustees and, over the past thirteen years, of its indomitable Library Director, Denni Grassel. Denni retired at the end of December.

The single most tangible, and even remarkable, accomplishment for Denni and her Board is the opening in 2019 of a new, stand-alone Library facility that is uniquely, among local Libraries at least, a "green" building. That means energy self-sufficient with solar collectors and geothermal technology built in, as well as a charging station and outdoor plant-based programming area. Monarch butterflies are hosted in an aquarium in the entranceway for, at the right time of year, release on a southerly trajectory to Mexico. None of that was possible in the all too cramped confines of the basement of the Delmont Borough Municipal Building, which previously housed DPL.

I came to know Denni initially as my hitch-a-ride-with-me passenger to the WLN's Green Forge headquarters in Greensburg, when I was still on the WLN Board of Directors. We traveled together for meetings there. For Denni, those 20-minute drives were not time for idle chat. She always had Library business to discuss, and regarded our time together on the way as meeting time. A 20-minute drive was barely enough to cover all the matters on her agenda. And an agenda she always had, of stored-up issues since the previous Green Forge trip. We became friends as well as colleagues in this way.

And then she asked my willingness to help write grant proposals. For most Library Directors, fundraising is a big part of the job description. Most of them struggle year to year to balance a budget that includes programming, book buying, and, yes, providing fair compensation to staff. Struggling most of the time against flat income, and all of the time against increasing yearly costs, fundraising consumes a lot of Library Director time in many public Libraries. More about that at another time. I said yes to grant writing.

So, we have worked together on identifying and applying for grant opportunities that bring special and exciting programming to all, and services to the underserved. Our particular, but not exclusive, focus has been Digital/STEM Literacy. We have done that in collaboration with Greensburg Hempfield Area Library, where there is a similar commitment to offer special programming via grants. That shared commitment, and Denni's natural disposition for the magic that Libraries do, exemplify what has made this one small Library in Delmont one of the very special ones.

Denni's leadership in making this happen will certainly be missed, but the "green" building itself, just the physical presence of it, lives on, and the spirit that Denni gave to it with her staff, will more than survive her retiring. I do not think that that energy will pass with Denni's retirement. Her spirit is a legacy to everyone who cares about "her"

Published in the Penn-Franklin News on January 4, 2023.

Library and to the community that it serves. If I am asked how one should retire, and there is a better “how,” I would just say that it is Denni’s way, with a legacy.

Charles B. Greenberg
Board Director, Murrysville Community Library Foundation