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WLN and Its Westmoreland Information Network

How do twenty-three small public Libraries with necessarily limited collections each on its own, scattered across a very large-area county such as Westmoreland County, come together to be a much larger entity with a much expanded collection for patrons of each Library?

They do so by being united as one Library District, the Westmoreland Library Network (WLN), one of 29 Districts in the state under the Office of Commonwealth Libraries, PA Department of Education, offering the joined collection electronically to all, no matter the physical location of each individual Library building. And they share in an understanding about who might be buying this or that to, of course, be shared across the county, so that no one Library gets burdened beyond budget capacity.

The network so formed is called the Westmoreland Information Network (WIN™). The WLN pays annual license fees to its commercial provider of supporting services, which are not insubstantial, and it employs a small but expert technical support team to maintain, update, and upgrade the servers, software, and access points on a regular basis. The WLN also maintains a daily book van service with two routes within the county that encompass all the WLN member Libraries. This whole operation is a major underlying success story of the Library service in Westmoreland County, and it has been so since late 2007. It was not easy to get there either.

This successful joining together, with so much benefit for all, but largely hidden from public view, is not to be taken for granted, but, in fact, it often is, especially as a consequence of the normal turnovers of staff and Board Trustee administrators. As you can imagine, a lot of turnover has happened since 2007.

After 20 years on the Murrysville Community Library Board, I am retiring this year. And I left the WLN Board, finally term-limited, in 2020 after 17 years of service. I am often called upon as “historian” to remind others of this fragile passing on of knowledge and purpose, and I may yet do so in the other, continuing roles that I have with three of the WLN Libraries. The success of the individual WLN Libraries depends on understanding the synergy of the whole and the need to continue to strengthen it. More importantly, to just pay attention to it.

So, today is my formal reminder to pay attention to the whole. If you are a new Board Trustee, do make the business of the Westmoreland Library Network and the Westmoreland Information Network part of your sense of responsibility to the service of the individual Library Board on which you now sit.

If you are a patron, take some time to notice what is your requested book’s point of origin. Thank the van driver when you see her/him at the front door of your Library lifting those heavy cartons. Thank Joe and Kenny, the WLN’s excellent technical support team, for keeping the WIN in top shape. And realize that this whole network is not “free.” It needs your support as a patron and donor.

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Charles B. Greenberg
Board Director, Murrysville Community Library Foundation