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American Library Association

It bears repeating again: Public Libraries do not stand alone as isolated entities of their communities. Pennsylvania public Libraries operate first of all within Districts under the state Office of Commonwealth Libraries, Department of Education, as “informal” educational institutions. There are 29 Districts, of which the Westmoreland Library Network is one. They are so guided and funded in parallel with “formal” institutions, meaning School Districts. They also operate under the guidance and support of the American Library Association (ALA) and the PA Library Association (PaLA).

The ALA’s mission is: “To provide leadership for the development, promotion, and improvement of library and information services and the profession of librarianship in order to enhance learning and ensure access to information for all.” Its priorities are: “Diversity, Equity of Access, Education and Continuous Learning, Intellectual Freedom, and 21st Century Literacy.” Not any wiggle room there in case you are of a mind to play censor for others. Public Libraries serve all, equally. Literacy for all, a 21st century American kind.

To those ends, the ALA and PaLA have been sources of exciting grant opportunities, ones that are not only merely budget extenders, which all public Libraries need, but nuclei for building the kind of Public Resource Centers that Delmont Public Library (DPL) and Greensburg Hempfield Area Library (GHAL) in particular are building, and about which I have been periodically writing. Again, there are three budding Centers so far: (1) Digital Literacy and Workforce Development; (2) Special Needs: Autism; and (3) Family Place Libraries.

New ALA grant opportunities for 2024 have already been announced. The first is a Round II after the “Libraries Transforming Communities I” (LTC I) grant of 2023 for Libraries serving small, rural communities of service area less than 25,000. Delmont Public Library is a recipient of LTC I. The funding is being used to support its Special Needs: Autism initiative, along with three other grants so far. DPL has applied for an LTC II grant as well to support the same initiative.

A second new grant opportunity is the Carnegie-Whitney Awards being offered by the ALA’s Publishing Committee for the purposes of “the preparation of print or electronic reading lists, indexes or other guides to library resources that promote reading or the use of library resources at any type of library.” The grant intent fits perfectly into the existing Family Place Libraries program at GHAL, and GHAL has already submitted its application.

These ALA grants are not huge in terms of dollar value typically, as much as \$20,000 in the last few years, but they are huge in potential impact on any community. They become building blocks to, not only be a foundational nucleus, but also to grow the idea of the Public Resource Center in mind.

They give the grantee an opportunity to think more expansively about what a public Library might be, rather than just thinking about the Library in terms of bricks and mortar. That is an

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important service of the ALA and PaLA, and it is on display by their various actions and offerings.

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