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Novices and Consultants

The Murrysville Community Library (MCL) Foundation has as its sole responsibility the raising of funds from donors and grantors for the assured and sustained operation of the MCL. By funds are meant both those that are for normal and special operations and those that are capital. In respect to the latter, the expansion/restoration of the Children's Room is the leading example from past projects (\$280K), but so too of note is the replacement of all computers and servers at a time when all in use were 10 years and more old (\$40K). How these things were achieved is now part of our history, but a lesson too.

For a fundraising Board of then bushy-tailed novices, three consultants, two paid and one volunteer, were necessary guides, all with good advice, each in her/his own way. I will leave them nameless even as I laud them.

The first, who is very knowledgeable and practiced about public libraries in particular, with fine credentials from past success, taught the novices how to ask for donations, how to approach potential donors with words that are meaningful and appealing. As simple as that. Nothing complicated; just building confidence in the novices that we were.

The second, also very expert and practiced about public libraries, was engaged first to develop a plan for renovation of the Library, a capital plan, and then to write a strategic plan for future operations. He came recommended by the PA Office of Commonwealth Libraries. He was very good at laying before the Board data about the Library itself. One very simple observation was that children accounted for 40% of circulation, but the actual space allotted to children's programming specifically at the time was only 16%. That one observation led to the decision to make, as Phase I of the Library's renovation, the expansion of area allotted to children's programming. It led to a reapportioning of a lightly used office space in the Municipal Building with the help and permission of the Municipality of Murrysville. It also led to a more welcoming and efficient use of existing space for the children's book collection. The Children's Room as you see it today grew out of that one observation from the consultant. He earned his fee just with that.

The third consultant is a Murrysville resident and friend of the MCL, a fundraiser already for a large university in Ohio. One day, I met him for breakfast at Dick's Diner so that I could cajole him into helping the Foundation Board. Too busy is what he gently said, three times. His wife, a longtime Library volunteer in her own right, wouldn't like that he would be adding to all his other volunteerism. And then his natural good will took over. He insisted on paying for breakfast and joined the team. He taught us about approaching corporations and individuals and publicly honoring donors. I honor him as donor too. His story, from turn-me-down to dig-in, became legend amongst us.

The Board novices became practiced, for the most part. Some remain on the Foundation Board today. There are new novices who have joined the Board in recent years. There are more needed. I tell you this story as invitation to apply for a seat on

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the Board, even as a novice, in case I have not done so before. Our consultants have taught us how to grow up from “novice,” and, if we could learn, so too you.

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