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In Spirit of Community: Arden and Denise

On March 15, at the Murrysville Community Library, I partook of and witnessed what can only be described as the living spirit of this community. A roomful of dedicated Library users and supporters came together in a surprise celebration to honor Arden Hamer for her 20 years of dedication to facilitating Book Clubs. Currently, she conducts two monthly, one on a Tuesday afternoon and one on a Thursday morning. Her “students” were there in numbers, but so were so many others with deep roots in the Library, and family members too. The joy of the occasion and gratitude were so palpable.

Arden is retired as Professor Emerita of the Developmental Studies Department at Indiana University of Pennsylvania, so she clearly has found a way to translate her teaching skills into a related learning setting. A perfect example for others who want to retire with purpose.

The person who was chief organizer, who created what will be a forever warm, lasting memory for all, was Angela Warfsman. She is a born organizer; that I know from other experiences. She and Library Director Amy Riegner and staff preserved the surprise over months of planning, right to that moment when the moveable divider wall separating two conference rooms, one filled with the day’s Book Club participants and the other with the many more invited community celebrants, was opened. Arden’s face made it clear that she had no prior idea that this was happening for her. So bravo to the organizers first!

Then to the presenters for all the memories they resurrected, the stories they told, and the accolades for Arden, and for serving to remind about the importance of books and Book Clubs to the fullness and freedom of life in America.

Denise Sticha, presently Executive Director of Centre County Library & Historical Museum, came with a bouquet of flowers in hand for Arden. Denise lives now in central PA, but she was Library Director of Murrysville Community Library until 2010, and concurrently WLN System Administrator 2005 through 2010. Thereafter, she served as “just” WLN System Administrator into 2012. Denise presided and led when the WLN (and MCL) implemented its biggest, most impactful project by far, installation of the Polaris Integrated Library System, while at the same time joining 20 WLN members (at the time) as one, with all the complexities that that meant at the outset.

As I wrote to Murrysville Council at the time, as President of the MCL Board: “we now have the opportunity to go to the next level of service, which includes absorbing all District functions into the WLN, as well as our original goal of settling the WLN Headquarters in a county-centralized site. This new realignment is being treated as the model for like actions that may be initiated throughout the state of PA, in which overlapping Systems and Districts have heretofore grown up in conflict with each other.”

Of course Denise’s accomplishments are many beyond even this one gem. So it was that while she was at the MCL years ago that she asked Arden Hamer to be Book Club

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Leader, knowing that she had exactly the right person. Denise was here on Tuesday afternoon to recount the story of how that came to pass. It is a tribute to Arden that Denise came back to celebrate with her and that packed room of Murrysville celebrants. If there were no other tribute, that tribute alone from a very busy statewide leader (having served also as President of the PA Library Association) would have sufficed for the recognition of Arden Hamer, retired university teacher, but yet teacher again through books at Murrysville Community Library.

A “champagne” toast there was, and is, for Arden and her people, who clearly cherished this occasion as few others get to be!

Charles B. Greenberg
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