

Westchester Library System
56th Annual Meeting – November 5, 2015
Interactive Presentation and Panel Discussion on
Library Trends: New Ideas to Engage Your Community



Pictured l-r: Rob Kissner, President of The Digital Arts Experience (DAE); Maureen Petry, Director of The Warner Library (Tarrytown); Liz Siracusa, Young Adult Librarian of The Warner Library (Tarrytown); Liz Anastasi, Teen Librarian of The Field Library (Peekskill); Risa Getman, Assistant Director of Hendrick Hudson Free Library (Montrose); Brian Kenney, Director of White Plains Public Library.

Over 50 librarians, library directors, library trustees, government officials, and friends of libraries gathered on November 5th at the Westchester Marriott for the 56th Annual Meeting of the Westchester Library System (WLS).

This year's Annual Meeting included a special interactive presentation and panel discussion on *Library Trends: New Ideas to Engage Your Community*. The panel consisted of the libraries noted below who are using collaboration, WLS leverage, and creativity to engage their communities in programs that foster learning, inquiry and discovery.

WHITE PLAINS PUBLIC LIBRARY: Director Brian Kenney spoke about how makerspaces and a designated teen

area, The EDGE, has transformed teen programming through use of their Media Lab and MakerSpace with hands-on audio visual, 3D printing and music editing equipment. One project taught the use of a sewing machine for three sessions over the summer, with a library display of photographs and work from the class that highlighted the teens' handiwork as well as the University of Fashion database supported through WLS. Interest in the class was overwhelming; and the class had to be enlarged from 15-28 spots. An upcoming project will present an exhibit of local Latino immigrant artists in the library's gallery space along with an opening reception that would include artist talk, poetry and/or music pairings. In collaboration with Arts Westchester for curatorial support, this project will support activities that promote participation by diverse audiences and communities.

HENDRICK HUDSON FREE LIBRARY (Montrose): Assistant Director Risa Getman spoke about how community programs funded with mini-grants represent a new trend in libraries and how they have engaged adults and inspired them to become part of the action. The success of a Creative Aging Grant, which focused on developing a staged reading of *Twelve Angry Men* with a teaching artist, built a core group of participants who expressed interest in developing the Library as Community Theatre. This interest led to the development of a future project—a production of *Love, Loss and What I Wore*. A course of ten sessions will be offered in 2016 and will focus on building acting techniques and skills and confidence as individual actors and as team members.

THE FIELD LIBRARY (Peekskill): Teen Librarian Liz Anastasi described the impact of one of their exciting teen programs funded through mini-grants supported by WLS. One teen program offered was part of a system-wide collaboration that engaged 4th through 9th graders in reading for fun and competition and led to participation of the teens in the 2nd Annual WLS Battle of the Books.

Two other programs seek to engage diverse urban teens in projects that incorporate STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Math) learning activities.

One entitled, *Electronic Fashion—Creating Wearable Smart Materials*, was a three-week program taught by an adjunct professor at Parson's School of Design who used tactile experiences of sewing

and fashion design to teach the electronic digital elements of technology, circuitry and computer programming. Participating teens created wearable electronic Halloween costumes. This program also took advantage of the University of Fashion database.

The other is entitled, *Trash to Treasure*, was held over the summer in conjunction with the Peekskill Youth Bureau. Under the guidance of an accomplished Westchester artist/author, teens explored, through artwork and essay, the science of creating natural pigments using sustainable sources and transforming repurposed materials into works of art via collage, painting and sculpture. The teens captured the importance of recycling and environmental awareness. Both artwork and essay were exhibited in the library's Field Gallery.

THE WARNER LIBRARY (Tarrytown): Director Maureen Petry and Young Adult Librarian Liz Siracusa, in collaboration with Rob Kissner of the Digital Arts Experience (DAE), discussed how their mini-grant program will use gaming software to inspire teens to create a digital model village design as part of the public input component for the study of the Metro North Train Station in Tarrytown. One of the goals of the project is to encourage sustainable development in a rapidly growing area.

Overall discussion covered the number of participants involved in each project; the importance of scheduling around school sports schedules; and how the projects offered an opportunity to work with new partners and drew communities together.

During the Business Meeting portion of the evening, presided over by WLS President Chris Hansen, the following trustees were elected to a 5-year term expiring as of December 31, 2020: Julie Mills-Worthey of Mount Vernon representing WLS District XIII [Mount Vernon]; Alex Payan of Port Chester representing WLS District X [Port Chester, Rye Brook, Rye City, Rye Town]; and Sean Ryan of Armonk representing WLS District V [Armonk, Bedford Village, Mount Pleasant, Pound Ridge].

Terry Kirchner, WLS Executive Director, gave an overview of WLS's accomplishments in 2015 that took place through the efforts of WLS and our 38 member libraries and others and highlighted the following:

- Enhanced and expanded access to electronic resources with self-learning tools available 24/7 such as Lynda.com (an extensive video library of top-quality courses taught by recognized industry experts) and University of Fashion (online video lessons created by fashion industry professionals) available to all patrons with a Westchester Library Card;
- Improved access to library content and ADA accessibility for the online library catalog;
- Receipt of the 2015 Distinguished Public Health Service Award from the Westchester County Board of Health in recognition of WLS's WEBS Career and Educational Counseling Service, Westchester Seniors Out Speaking, and Senior Benefits Information Centers;
- Senior Law Day sponsor and website host of 24/7 information site;
- Library staff training programs focused on mental health education;
- Second Battle of the Books, a book trivia competition for grades 4-9 that included teams from more than half of the libraries in the County;
- WLS Unlimited Possibilities Mini-grant Initiative (a grant program established to fund community engagement projects that foster creativity and love of learning for all ages).

These accomplishments align with key trends that are affecting the library community including:

- A desire for increased accessibility to content;
- the expansion of mobile technology as the primary personal device;
- a growing entrepreneurial and freelance-based economy that offers less employment stability but more flexibility;
- more emphasis on sustainability;
- library programs as a powerful community engagement tool;

- libraries as educational places that support and encourage informal and active learning;
- a re-thinking of library spaces to foster more hands-on activities and provide community meeting and working spaces.

Libraries must face these trends while dealing with several challenges, such as low budget growth and the fast pace of change in technology and social attitudes. However, one of the real strengths of the library community is its resilience—despite its pending death having been pronounced numerous times. Successful libraries keep redefining services in ways that stay true to their mission yet listen to their communities and adapt to meet their anticipated needs while finding ways to inform the community about the services that are available.

Innovative programs need a place to happen. Thanks was given to New York State for including funds in the 2014-15 budget for Library Construction Aid; a total of \$669,526 was awarded to 15 WLS libraries for 16 library projects. The majority of these projects were for improvements to the essentials--roofs, HVAC systems, lighting, an elevator and a back-up generator. Others were for renovations to library spaces improving: access to the building, adult and teen areas, program rooms, bathrooms, and even an entire library. This vital program enables libraries to ensure a safe environment for all and allows libraries to focus on innovative services to meet their community needs. Dr. Kirchner also thanked Laura Rossi, Executive Director of the Westchester Community Foundation, for awarding WLS a \$25,000 grant to support library staff training in marketing, media, public relations and related activities.



Pictured l-r: Hon. Steven Otis, NYS Assembly 91st District, and Terry Kirchner, WLS Executive Director

As WLS moves into 2016, work will continue with the member libraries to build on our accomplishments and to advocate for additional public and private funds. Activities will focus on the potential relocation of the WLS headquarters to a new space. The current lease expires in June 2016, and WLS is actively exploring ways to redesign the existing space or move to a new location. WLS is also finalizing the next WLS Plan of Service for 2017-2021.

All were encouraged to attend the [2016 WLS Breakfast on April 13th](#) to celebrate and honor the great work performed at Westchester libraries. Keynote speaker will be retired Congressman Barney Frank, who has actively promoted civic engagement, diversity and lifelong learning throughout his career. This event also serves as the primary fundraiser to support the Unlimited Possibilities Mini-Grants that have provided the member libraries with the means to try new ways to create sustainable community engagement and to attract new people to their libraries, as evidenced by the dynamic panel discussion.

All were thanked for their support given to WLS over the past year.