

5th annual Friends' Day at CLA

Saturday June 16, 2001

9 - 10:15

Advocacy: Key role of Friends of the Library groups

Guest speaker will be Jan Dalmyn. Delegates will learn about the issues and techniques of advocacy, and the Winnipeg experience. Response to this experience, and the outcomes will be discussed by the speaker, the former chair of the Friends of the Winnipeg Public Library.

Advocacy tips from Jan Dalmyn

- Be vigilant. Threats can appear at any time.
- Enjoy the benefits of building a coalition.
- Children can be eloquent speakers, and they are entitled to be heard.
- Build a reputation for credibility. Do your research. Be accurate.
- Be vocal in good times as well as bad. Trumpet your value.
- Start with a legislator you know and keep in touch.
- Stick to the issue.
- Do your homework.
- Get to know library staff.
- Work in all legislative levels - federal, provincial and municipal.
- Be personal. Use charm to help make your case.
- Seal the deal. Know what you want and ask for a commitment.
- Don't be misinformed. If you don't know, find out.
- Support and gain the confidence of the CEO.
- Use media coverage to reveal politicians' bias, and work on the people not on your side
- Find advocacy partners. Use the phone book, newspaper clippings, networks and e-mail

If you want to learn about library advocacy, who better to learn it from than Jan Dalmyn, former Chair of the Friends of the Winnipeg Public Library? Her entry into library advocacy began, as she says "innocently enough", as a School Council member attending a meeting to try and save the community's branch library.

"Little did I know that I had launched the next 6 years of my life!" she said, by way of an introduction.

Through her initial efforts to save that branch, and bring together other advocates to save all six branches up for closure, the group formed in 1993 and became known as READ (Residents for the Enhancement and Development of Libraries). Later that year they were invited to merge with the Friends of the Winnipeg Public Library, which dated from 1991. The Friends also had a history of enhancing community awareness and use of libraries, and involved themselves in the 1992 municipal election and made budget presentations during 1993.

Jan made budget presentations to Council on behalf of the Friends in 1994 and 1995, which resulted in a "status quo" situation except for a drop in materials acquisition budgets. Jan was invited to plan the agenda and invitees to a "Mayor's Round Table on Libraries". That year she also started writing a column for Quill and Quire, and presented at the provincial library conference.

That same year a leaked document revealed 7 branches were under threat of space reductions. Jan toured all seven facilities, spoke with staff, provided information to alerted media, and attended community meetings. A set of recommendation, unanimously adopted by Council, called for increased staffing and materials budgets, planned public consultation, and no further reductions without the recommended enhancements.

They continued to be involved in municipal politics during the election which took place within weeks of that vote, and followed with opposition to a budget proposal to allow a \$5.00 library membership card fee. Jan organized a delegation to the Minister in the Department of Culture, Heritage and Citizenship, and received assurance the government had no intention of reversing an earlier 1993 position opposing the fee.

Jan provided samples of newspaper reports during this period. The headlines were electric - "War over libraries heats up", "Library cuts plan ripped", "Library cost-cutting plan devastating - activists", "Library preservation a key issue", and "Mayoral rivals pledge more for libraries".

The public consultation process recommended in 1995 resulted in "The Forward Thinking Review Process", which was a major review of the library situation from March to July of 1996. The group met weekly, conducted polls and focus groups, collected data, and made recommendations which were mainly accepted by City Council, and implemented through the 1997 budget process.

In 1998 Jan organized the "Advocates for a Free Public Library", which included the Friends, to once again oppose introduction of a library user fee. The Library hosted a public debate, where the Library Board spoke in favour of the proposed fee, and the Advocates and the Manitoba Library Association spoke against. The media reported those who opposed the fee won the debate, and the provincial government stated they would not entertain a request from the city to allow the fees.