

TIME FOR CHANGE

The military periodically carries out formal ceremonies called “changing of the guard.” Analogously but less demonstratively the Eldredge Library Board of Trustees elects new officers to replace those who have reached their term limits (the maximum length of time an officer can hold the same office).

Terms for officers are for one year; three years is the maximum. Unlimited terms are supposed to provide increasing competence, know-how, etc., and perhaps they do, sometimes. For the Trustees, however, longer term limits afford no real benefit and lose the advantage of new energies and ideas. This year, of the Board’s five officers, three -- the President (Dick Evans), Vice President (Phyllis Freeman), and Clerk (Stephanie Bartlett) -- will be “termed out” on September 19.

Nearing that turning point, it seems appropriate to sum up what has (and has not) been accomplished over the past three years.

Perhaps the single most important measure is that the Eldredge has maintained a 4-star rating throughout this period. That is an achievement of which we can all be proud - the staff, the Trustees, the Friends, indeed the entire town which has supported it so strongly. Currently the library is ranked 8th highest among all 370 libraries in Massachusetts.

The first and ever-present concern of the Board is to oversee funding of library operations. The recession made this a challenge. We determined that because of the general reduction in interest rates and yields, drawdowns from our endowment had to be limited to 3.5% of the total value in order to reduce the risk of loss by gradual erosion. At the same time, the town, because of its own budget concerns, was unable to significantly increase its support to the library. These negatives were offset by increases

in our Annual Funds (16% over three years), gifts from the Friends of the Library (totaling \$131,000), and by tightened management of our own budget and investments. The net was that cutbacks in staffing and services were avoided, and finances have been placed in a stronger position.

Nevertheless a major wish remains unfulfilled: our employees have had no salary increase for five years. They performed marvelously in handling the great surge in library use that accompanied the economic hard times. Suitably rewarding them remains on the agenda for the new officers.

Turning to matters other than funding, a major effort was made to review and improve the library's formal (and sometimes informal) guidelines and policies. Among those policies reviewed and revised at greatest length were the:

- bylaws
- investment policy
- accounting procedures
- employees manual
- whistleblowing policy

Throughout this period the often-asked question has been, does the increasing availability of new types of media affect our library? Will this eventually make libraries redundant or irrelevant? I can name one library that it won't. Far from growing obsolescent, overall use of the Eldredge has grown from in three years and shows no sign of diminishing. In fact, relative to town size the Eldredge it is one of the most heavily used library on the Cape.

One reason for our growth is that the staff has stayed on top of developments in alternative forms of media, and experimented to see whether and how new trends would resonate with users. For example, as it became clear that DVDs and

movies were being much more highly sought, acquisitions in those types of media have been greatly increased.

A survey was taken to measure the public's use and wishes for the library. Among other things it showed that use is lowest in the already busy 20-40 year-old age group. So, we've been experimenting creatively to try to increase use among the younger (as well as older) adults. One remarkably successful example has been a series of ballroom dancing lessons -- a nontraditional library service. Another is a series of short videos depicting different library activities; a fourth video is in the works.

A problem which has gotten worse is, as you can guess.....parking. It's not so bad during most of the year, but in summer it remains our major shortcoming. We have been able to find no easy or affordable solution to it.

A bit wistfully in closing, I want to compliment and thank the 14 member Board with whom it has been both a privilege and pleasure to serve. They have been devoted, hardworking and not least, fun to work with. Thank you all.

This is a strong board, with diverse and creative talents. Whoever is elected to succeed us in September, I am confident that under their guidance the Library will continue to be the Cultural Center of Chatham.

Dick Evans

President, Board of Trustees