

West Islip Public Library 50th Anniversary Celebration
June 10, 2007 - 2pm
Introductory Remarks by Andrew Hamm, Director

Thank you for joining us this afternoon as we celebrate the 50th Anniversary of the opening of the West Islip Public Library.

To begin today's program the program I would like to ask every one to stand while Library Board President Davine Schwarz leads us in the Pledge of Allegiance.

I would also like to ask you to remain standing for a moment of silence in honor of the men and women of our armed forces.

The Library first opened its doors on May 18, 1957. Its original home was a former machine shop on 43 Hawley Avenue that was donated by local industrialist William Dzus. This first small library, initially open 12 hours a week, was a labor of love, organized and staffed by volunteers with a modest collection of mostly-donated books that had been obtained from individuals and groups throughout the community.

It is now 50 years later and the library is housed in a modern, 35,000 sq ft state of the art facility, open seven days a week during much of the year, and offers library users over 200,000 items in a wide variety of formats including books, periodicals, video, CD, and software, as well as public internet computers, meeting rooms, and a large and well stocked children's room.

But the square footage of the building, the size of collection, or number of computers do not tell the real story of West Islip Public Library. A library without the human element is just a warehouse full of old books. It is people: people who have a vision of making their community a better place to live by starting a library, people who work on a day to day basis to make that vision a reality, people who use and support a library and help it grow ---that makes it a special place. And that is the real story of the West Islip Public Library. What I would like to do this afternoon is to reflect briefly upon the people who made this library what it is today. While I cannot possibly name all the hundreds of individuals who have given their time and effort to the library, I hope we can collectively honor them through today's celebration.

Our story actually starts several years before the 1957 opening of the library. It is the story of some very dedicated individuals committed to the creation of a public library in a community that was beginning to experience Long Island's great post-war development boom. It was in November of 1954 that Grace T. Lindenberg, then President of PTA in the Secatogue Elementary School, first called for a committee to look into forming a public library in the West Islip. From this start came the Friends of the West Islip Public Library, a group dedicated to the creation of a new library. When their first attempt to create a publicly supported library did not succeed, they formed the West Islip Library Association, supported by member contributions, and were granted a provisional Charter by New York State October of 1956, which I have on display here on the wall. The founding trustees, in addition to Mrs. Lindenberg, were Gloria Van Caeseele, Martha Limberg, Astrid Pulver, John S. Steele, Ridgeway T. Haggerty, and Arthur S. Babbitz. Their names, along with that of William Dzus, can be found on the bronze plaque that is permanently displayed in the library's entrance.

Now that they had a charter and a building, there was still a tremendous amount of work that needed to be done before the library could open to the public. Members of the association went door to door in the community seeking funds, books, equipment, membership and most importantly, volunteers. These founding trustees and the many volunteers who assisted them essentially built the first library from scratch, right down to moving furniture and waxing the floors. The new library, initially staffed with volunteers, was open 12 hours a week. Soon they hired a professional librarian and were able to extend hours. The library was so successful and so well used by the community that in a few short years not only had the library outgrown its original building, but

the community had thoroughly accepted the need for a public library , ----when a proposal was made in 1961 to make the library publicly supported, it was overwhelmingly approved.

Since becoming a School District Public Library in that year, many community members have been elected to the Library's Board of Trustees and have gone on to serve with great distinction. As the name implies, trustees hold the library in trust for the community-- they have the responsibility for the library, from hiring a director, setting policy, overseeing the preparation of budgets and expenditure of funds, approving the library's plan of service, to planning for the future. They receive no compensation for this task, other than the knowledge that they are helping to make West Islip a better place to live. Over the years they have shepherded the library through the many changes it has undergone: the move to the Captree shopping center on Union Boulevard in 1961, the construction of a major new library building here at the corner of Higbie Lane in the late 1960s, as well as undertaking a major renovation and expansion in recent years.

Another essential component in the library's success these past 50 years has been the library staff. Whether selecting materials or answering questions, conducting story hours and craft programs for children, organizing activities for families and seniors, facilitating the processing and circulation of materials, keeping the computers running, organizing the shelves, or insuring that the library is clean and safe, it is the staff that makes the library work on a day to day basis. The staff at West Islip tends to be very loyal, and over the years it has not been unusual to have employees with twenty, thirty, or even close to forty years of service. My predecessor as Director, Miss Carter, had thirty-seven years with the library, 30 of them as Director. With this level of dedication it is not surprising then that this golden anniversary is very meaningful to past and present staff.

Over the years the library has been fortunate to have an active and dedicated group of supporters in the Friends of the Library. The first Friends of the library were active in the forming of the West Islip Library Association when it was chartered in 1956. After the library became publicly supported in 1961, the library association was dissolved with many of its members becoming the core of a new reconstituted Friends of the Library. This group has consistently supported the library through thick and thin, and has over the years sponsored numerous concerts, art shows, bus trips, and is locally reknowned for its Book Fairs, which now are their major fund raising activity. The Friends have donated many thousands of dollars to the library for equipment and projects since it was organized, and in just the past 10 years have donated over \$70,000, much of it funding the new circulation desk that was added as part of the library's recent renovation.

Volunteers have also played an important role in the story of the West Islip Public Library. In the earliest days of the library, the library was staffed by volunteers, and to this day volunteers assist in a variety of ways. One of our longest serving volunteers, Davine Schwarz worked in the 1970s on the bookmobile that visited areas of the library district, to this day continues to volunteer in the library in addition to being President of the Board of Trustees.

In the end, however, the most important factor in the success of the West Islip Public Library has been the West Islip community itself. We would not be celebrating the library's 50th anniversary if it were not for the active support of the community. Unlike public education, there is no legal requirement that a community provide library service to its residents. Nevertheless, 50 years ago West Islip made a conscious decision to form and support a public library. At each stage in the library's development over the past fifty years, the community has been there to support and extend library service. The formation of the library, the construction of this building, and its recent renovation and expansion would not have been possible without the approval of the community, nor would the library have developed into what it is today without the public's constant support.

At this time I would like to ask the members of the library board of trustees to come forward so that I may present them with this plaque to be placed in main entrance of the library.

THE WEST ISLIP PUBLIC LIBRARY



COMMEMORATING A HALF CENTURY OF
SUPPORT BY
THE WEST ISLIP COMMUNITY

JUNE 10, 2007