

Getting to Know Your Elected Leaders – Part 4

By Alan Smith

Congratulations! Your candidate won the election! And you've all partied hard because you worked hard and all deserve it! Guess what the next day is? It's the first day of your elected leader's re-election campaign even before taking office. Truly that is the advice that knowledgeable campaign consultants give their clients the day after winning.

You, of course, wisely backed the candidate because they support libraries. But other people had many other reasons to support that person as well. And now very often those special interests come calling. Your new leader receives constant demands to increase services and funding for many other constituencies throughout the community besides libraries. These include public safety, health workers, construction projects, affordable housing, resolving homeless issues and the list goes on forever.

With all this well meaning input to your leader, you must stay on message about the need to support libraries. It also helps if the leader knows you have interests in the community besides libraries that your leader also supports. As an example, in my community the city council strongly backs *Rebuild America* (formerly Christmas in April). All city council members and the mayor turn out on work projects. My contribution was – have old truck, know the way to the dump with construction debris. Nothing builds a relationship faster than you and the mayor on a warm sweaty Saturday afternoon both grubby, loading trash into your truck. Also when you see a diminutive city council member splattered with paint at another project you can share the moment and know you are all working together for the betterment of your community. Thus, when they see you supporting one of their major causes, you are winning their support of your library cause at the same time because they know what you stand for.

How else can you continue to build that relationship? When you see them around town, stop and say "hello" and say something about the library. Periodically go to the City Council or Board of Supervisors meeting and use public comment time to share activities about the library. One or two minutes is all it takes and if you're meeting is televised, as many are, you may have hundreds or thousands of people listening. Indeed, I've had people come up to me months after speaking in public and comment because they remembered I had been supporting the library.

Remember when speaking at such meetings be concise, succinct and simple. Also, even if you are on a first name basis with council members and you visit each other's home, in these settings address them formally and not by a casual first name. In addition, when making a request, be civil, not demanding or accusatory. Every city has its share of unique citizens who pose a challenge to

the council members and you don't want to be one of those.

Why does your voice count? Your library director is paid to care for libraries, however, you are using your personal time and talents and your elected leaders recognize this. Thus, your involvement displays your earnest commitment for libraries.

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Getting_to_know_your_elected_leaders.doc
Directory: C:\Documents and Settings\jeff.b.trunnelle\Desktop
Template: C:\Documents and Settings\jeff.b.trunnelle\Application
Data\Microsoft\Templates\Normal.dot
Title: Electeds #4
Subject:
Author: Kathy Morris
Keywords:
Comments:
Creation Date: 8/21/2006 9:35 PM
Change Number: 3
Last Saved On: 8/21/2006 9:35 PM
Last Saved By: Wells Fargo User
Total Editing Time: 1 Minute
Last Printed On: 8/21/2006 9:49 PM
As of Last Complete Printing
Number of Pages: 2
Number of Words: 458 (approx.)
Number of Characters: 2,613 (approx.)