

Three Decades and \$1 Million Later, Lillian Steps Down

by Chris Seymour

If anyone ever deserved to have a library wing or room named in their honor, it has to be Lillian Levin.

Over the past 30 years, Levin has helped raise over \$1 million for Welles-Turner Library as the chairwoman and longtime sparkplug of the Friends of the Library used book sales.

That long run will come to an end this Tuesday, May 31, as the 82-year-old finally retires from her volunteer position as chairwoman of the sales.

Levin retains her obvious passion for libraries, but admitted recently she is “running out of steam.” She has been the chairwoman of the Friends of the Welles-Turner Library’s book sales since 1986.

During that time, the Friends’ various book sales—including the annual spring and fall sales—have raised exactly \$1,012,800.

“I wanted to leave it at \$1 million but we got \$12,800 more,” said Levin with a laugh.

The spring book sale earlier this month garnered \$21,256, pushing the total raised during Levin’s tenure over the \$1 million mark.

“All of that money went to benefit the library,” stressed Levin. “It makes me—it makes us feel proud; I have a terrific committee.”

In retirement, Levin said she is looking forward to taking it easy and spending more time with her husband Gerald. They will be celebrating their 60th wedding anniversary on June 24.

“I am running out of steam to tell you the truth; my age is catching up with me,” said Levin. “We will travel, we will relax; we are starting to downsize, get rid of stuff; and I am just going to take it easy.”

Levin moved to Glastonbury from Ohio in 1986 with Gerald, a retired university professor (he was an English professor at the University of Akron) who also wrote textbooks.

“My husband wrote textbooks and his publisher was in New York and we have always vacationed in Connecticut; we just love Connecticut,” she said of their reason for relocating to the Constitution State.

Once she arrived in town, Levin immediately got involved as a volunteer at the library and helped revive the then-dormant Friends of the Library organization.

“Looking into joining the Friends of the Library in Glastonbury, she was told that the Friends group was inactive since 1980,” said Friends Board member Kelly Gineo. “A new group was in the process of being formed at Welles-Turner.”

Finding out that Levin had 20 years involvement with library volunteer work in Ohio, a member of the library board nominated her to become president of the revitalized group.

Before her move to Connecticut, Levin ran book sales that raised money for a library in Akron, OH.

Levin also had a part-time job working in the registrar’s office at the University of Akron. “I used to check students’ qualifications for graduation,” she recalled.

“And they let me set my own hours, which was wonderful, and I had my summers off; there was always somebody there for the children,” she added. She and Gerald have two grown daughters, who now live in Missouri and New Jersey.

She and Gerald also have six grandkids and their first great grandchild is due to arrive this September.

Though she is a volunteer at Welles-Turner, Levin noted the work she does—which includes sorting, pricing and packing books donated by the public for the sales—is fulltime work “if it’s done right.”

When a book sale is on the horizon, she ends up working seven days a week. “I’m usually here Monday-Friday 8-4,” said Levin. “Because of heavy donations before any sale, I come on Saturdays and Sundays if the library is open. We are closed on Sundays, Memorial Day to Labor Day.”

Though she said she won’t know what she will miss most about Welles-Turner until she retires, Levin—who will still remain a member of the Friends’ board—said she knows she will miss coming into the library every day.

“I enjoy what I am doing and I have a lot of friends here, [but] I’ll still be coming in,” she said. “I will probably work the book sales and cashier or something, but I just can’t be here seven days a week anymore.”

Though she has played a huge role in raising

\$1,012,800 via the Friends’ book sales for the library over the years, Levin herself isn’t much of a reader, she admitted.

“The only time I get to read is when I go on vacation because when I am here eight hours I am doing manual work,” she remarked. “When I read in bed, I am good for five minutes and that’s it—I am out.”

In addition to being heavily involved with her local library, Levin has also been involved with the state and national library friends groups.

“I was on the Friends of Connecticut Libraries for 10 years and I was president for three terms,” said Levin, who was also the Friends of the Welles-Turner Library’s president “off and on for 12 years.” She also served on The Friends of Libraries U.S.A. Board for six years.

In 1996, when she was president of the state Friends group, Levin wrote a manual on how to run book sales. “It was published by the Friends of Connecticut Libraries and then in 2000 I updated it so there are two editions, and there is a copy upstairs at Welles-Turner,” said Levin, who added that the manual is now out of date.

“And I might mention, the manual that I wrote, all the money went to the state friends—I did not accept a penny,” she observed.

The Friends spend a lot of pennies on Welles-Turner each year—to the tune of \$45,000-\$60,000.

“We spend \$45,000-\$60,000 a year on this library between annual purchases and special purchases,” said Levin. “We spend money on furniture and media and we paid for the four self-checkout stations.”

Those purchases have been made possible by the generous donations of books from community members, who Levin described as “just wonderful.”

“They are big history readers, big biography readers and they have good quality books—not so much book of the month club if you know what I mean,” said Levin of the hundreds of books the community donates to the library each week.

Levin will be sorely missed by her colleagues, including Rosemarie Houston, who is one of three people—along with Kelley Rodino and Melinda Smith—who will be filling Levin’s



Lillian Levin

shoes as co-chairs of future book sales. All three are longtime book sale volunteers.

“Lillian Levin is a dynamo,” said Houston. “Her 30 years of experience of course are a huge part of why she is extremely successful as the book sale chair. However, it is her endless energy and drive that makes the book sale an institution in Glastonbury and beyond... [S]he is nationally known for her book sale expertise.”

Houston explained that Levin has worked fulltime in the Friends office year-round with her committee. “She tirelessly keeps track of what needs to get done and makes sure that the rest of the volunteers complete every detail,” said Houston.

Gineo called Levin “a spitfire character” who “has put her heart and soul into raising money for our book sales.”

Now the Friends will see if three people can do the job of one!