

Weber, Warren - CBPL 25th anniversary oral history 2023-05-19

Antonia Krupicka-Smith: [00:00:00] Okay, so this is another entry for our oral histories, um, archive. And this is about the 25th anniversary for the library building. Uh, we are here today. My name is Antonia Krupicka- Smith, spelled a n t o n i a k r u p i c k a, hyphen, s m i t h, and I am the library director here at the Council Bluffs Public Library. We are at 400 Willow Avenue here in Council Bluffs, in the library boardroom, and it is 3:10 p.m. on Friday, May 19th, 2023, and I am here today with Warren. Warren. Would you introduce yourself?

Warren Weber: My name is Warren Weber, w a r r e n, last name w e b e r. And I was on the board of the library for 24 years. I don't know the exact starting and ending dates, but I'm sure that's part of the record somewhere.

Antonia Krupicka-Smith: Awesome. Do I have permission to record [00:01:00] you today, Warren?

Warren Weber: You do.

Antonia Krupicka-Smith: Great. So you mentioned that your role 25 years ago was library board member.

Warren Weber: Mm-hmm.

Antonia Krupicka-Smith: Did you have an office during that time, were you president, vice president?

Warren Weber: I was president. And. Maybe vice president? Uh, I don't think I was either secretary or treasurer if they had one. I'm not sure about that. But...

Antonia Krupicka-Smith: Yeah.

Warren Weber: I served as president a couple of different terms.

Antonia Krupicka-Smith: Yeah. And what's your role now in the community?

Warren Weber: I'm retired. I volunteer, uh, on a couple of boards still. Uh, soon to be finished with that based on term limits and the rest of the time I

spend with, uh, chasing grandchildren that are still in high school and also one that is a step grandchild that is four years old.

Antonia Krupicka-Smith: Awesome.

Warren Weber: So do that. And personal interest. I do a lot of gardening in the summer, a lot of woodworking. Uh, a lot of reading, uh, and some [00:02:00] traveling.

Antonia Krupicka-Smith: Awesome. Okay, so, um, are you from Council Bluff?

Warren Weber: No, no. I moved here in 1970 from northeast Iowa. I was a teacher at that time at Abraham Lincoln High School, and I did that for three years. And then I worked for the district and their central office, uh, for another six years. We left for five years, came back in '84 and I retired as a principal at Thomas Jefferson High School in 2002.

Antonia Krupicka-Smith: Okay, so we are sharing memories today about the building of this library building. So the most pertinent memory that I'm most curious about right now is, any memory you have associated with the planning of this building. So can you remember when you first heard about the idea of having a new building or what role you played in the planning of this building?

Warren Weber: [00:03:00] We, when I first came on the board, we were still at the Carnegie building and there had been, I think, three bond issues, which had failed dramatically. In terms of building a new library, it was obvious the limits were there with a Carnegie building and there was no way to overcome those limits and still have a library that served the community very well.

And so there had been plans through an architect, uh, that were there, but for whatever reason, uh, the community just said, no. We're not gonna pay for a new library. So, uh, the question was, now what? Uh, it seemed pointless to do another bond issue when the first two or three just failed badly. I mean, it wasn't even [00:04:00] close. So, uh, I don't know quite how the decision was made, but the decision was made to figure out if we could fund this through contributions from the community. And the architects updated the plan and the library started, the board and others, started working on behalf. The foundation started working on behalf of the library and the campaign was initiated.

And the short story is, it was successful. Uh, I don't remember the dollar figure, but I think 25 years ago the building was constructed for somewhere in the

neighborhood of 15 million. Um, so there were some major contributions from families like the Bennett family from Iowa West Foundation, and there were a lot of individual contributions, people giving a hundred dollars, \$50, whatever it is.

And eventually it added up to the [00:05:00] point where it was apparent that we could do the new library. I don't remember the location and how that was acquired. Uh, that, yeah, if that was discussed while I was, on my early years on the board, I don't remember, but the location was acquired. Uh, there used to be a Sears building and maybe a bank in this area, but all of that was done. And so, uh, the, the lot was prepared to build the library. Um, so 26, 27 years ago, construction started, um, God, I can't think now. When I first came on the board, the librarian was a woman named Barbara Chernik and then Jim, is it Stone? [Godsey]... became the librarian [00:06:00] who was here when the transition actually took place.

And so he was the first librarian [director] in the new library. Um, so there was a lot of planning of details on how to get all this done and put together how to transfer all the materials from Carnegie over to Willow Avenue. And, uh, all of that took place. Um, there was a major opening, uh, both for previous board members and friends of the library and foundation members. And the key speaker when this first opened was an author by the name of David Halberstam. And then it was a general opening and everybody was, and I think continues to be impressed with the building. And what it's like to come in and take advantage. So [00:07:00] that's what I remember of the transition from Carnegie to here.

Um, it was a lot of work. Uh, everybody was excited, um, and I never heard from anybody who voted against the bond issues much about why this building. It all seemed to be pretty well received. So I don't, I don't really know that the bond issue took place before I was on the board.

Antonia Krupicka-Smith: Mm-hmm.

Warren Weber: And so I don't really know if it was just a financial thing, they didn't want to raise taxes.

Uh, if there were other issues. I don't remember. That's not part of my experience.

Antonia Krupicka-Smith: Mm-hmm.

Warren Weber: So that's what I remember about the, the transition. Um, it was kind of an exciting time, um, and uh, we had a lot of fun with getting the, the planning and, and [00:08:00] all of that. It was a very busy time for the board because a lot of the details had to be reviewed and make sure that okay, it fits and it's all according to Hoyle. So, uh, it was a very involved kind of time with the board.

Antonia Krupicka-Smith: Do you remember any setbacks? Like, is there one that you're like, that could have made or break it?

Warren Weber: Well, I think what happened, Tom Hanafan was mayor at the time, and somewhere I was in conversation with him, it dawned on him that, uh, this building was three times the size of the Carnegie building. And of course the city as always, contributed a budget that provides for maintenance and equipment and collection and salaries and so forth. And he realized, oh my God, this is gonna cost three times as much in order to fill it with collection, have staff available [00:09:00] to manage that collection, manage the increased, uh, traffic into and out of the library and so forth.

And, but to his credit, he did it. And I know the budget went up, uh, but it went up and so it's been supportive, generally supportive of, I mean, by comparison to other cities our size, we may not rank the highest on per capita spending for library services in the community, but it has been supported very well with what there is, and each of the directors has made the greatest use of the funds available. So that's the, the one thing I remember is kind of a, whatever you want to call it, speed bump. Um.

Antonia Krupicka-Smith: Mm-hmm.

Warren Weber: But it didn't stop the whole issue. As far as the actual construction, if it was something that, like, where the [00:10:00] architect said, oh, we can't do what we thought we could do, I don't remember anything like that.

Antonia Krupicka-Smith: Mm-hmm.

Warren Weber: Um, it was just an expansion of the budget that was gonna be needed to maintain, uh, the collection and the, and the whole operation in a new setting.

Antonia Krupicka-Smith: Mm-hmm. So do you remember opening day? Were you there on opening day?

Warren Weber: Yeah. Um, well the one day I remember is where we all came over and signed the I-Beam that was gonna be the peak of the roof. Um, now, opening day, I'm not sure I remember. I know we were here. I know that it was kind of like a ribbon cutting sort of thing. I don't know that I remember the specifics of that. Uh, but other than there were people here. I do remember the event where they invited David Halberstam to speak and everything was very nicely set up and very elegant and very fun to do and he was a [00:11:00] fun author to listen to as well as to read.

Antonia Krupicka-Smith: Mm-hmm. Are you a Gold Card member?

Warren Weber: Yeah. And I've had to have a, a label replaced a couple times because the black ink doesn't last 25 years. So, but yeah, I still have the gold card and still use it.

Antonia Krupicka-Smith: Yeah. Is there any other memories you wanna share associated with this building or your time or your use of the library?

Warren Weber: Um, let me stop and think a minute. Um, it was interesting the transition of people who were directors. Uh, Barbara [Chernik] was, I think Barbara followed Mildred [Smock], and, uh, she was very enthusiastic and it was, uh, very motivating kind of experience for her and us to work with her. Uh, Jim was much more [00:12:00] quiet, much more of a, um, person who would, uh, very detailed, but not, um, not a person who people knew very well. He tended to stay with the job in the office and in the building and, and kind of worked that way.

Um, I remember Dianne as the children's librarian and she was full of enthusiasm and she served as an interim. One year in between, I think Jim's work and then I think Barbara Peterson followed Jim. So Diane served, or Dianne Herzog served as an interim and she did very well and it was to the point where the board said, you might be interested? And the answer was not a prayer. You've [00:13:00] got to be kidding. And so we said, okay, that's fine. You know, she says, I am a children's librarian. I love doing it. I do not want to deal with all the administrative and management functions that go with being director.

So, um, so we, uh, conducted a search and uh, Barbara emerged and I think I helped organize that search and then after Barbara left, helped to organize the search for Kathy. Um, and we had some really, both times, very interesting applications and people you looked at and you thought, I'm not sure I know why you're applying, you know, It's like being a librarian on a Navy sub may not do

the trick. So it was just [00:14:00] interesting to see how people view the job and what, and whether they thought they could do it or not. Uh, so we did quite a bit of homework and it worked out very well in both cases. Um, and then I think during Kathy's time was when we established term limits. Um, and it was, um, and there had been some, uh, there was one gentleman, a man by the name of Phil Wilson, was on the library when I came on. I replaced a man by the name of Don Klohr, K L O H R. And he was leaving, um, and he said, do you think, and I said, well, yeah. And so somehow it happened that I was appointed. And it's some, uh, and so, um, Phil was on the board at the time, and then when Phil left, he left [00:15:00] because he changed residences. He moved to Omaha.

Antonia Krupicka-Smith: Mm-hmm.

Warren Weber: And Phil had been on the board for 44 years, and Phil was a really good board member. He really was. I mean, there were others who were less than in terms of their ability to do homework or their willingness to do the homework and, and pay attention to long-term short-term things. But, but I said, Phil, you were on this board when I graduated from high school, and he just kinda shrugged like, so is that a problem? I said, no, it's not a problem. So all things considered, for a variety of reasons, we moved into term limits and uh, I don't even know what they are in my three terms of three years.

Antonia Krupicka-Smith: Yeah.

Warren Weber: Something like that. So, uh, that helped with, um, kind of getting more people involved with the library and what it does and [00:16:00] what it could do and how to represent the community. I know the mayor thought, yes, I get the idea, but I think Matt or Tom was, no, it was with Matt. Matt was mayor at the time and he said, you sometimes though, he says, the issue is it's hard to find people who are willing to serve and um when there's a higher rate of turnover, it means more going out and finding somebody who's willing to be a board member or somebody who's willing to stay on for 44 years. It makes the mayor's job a little simpler. It's like, okay, that's one person I don't have to present to the city council for approval.

Antonia Krupicka-Smith: Mm-hmm.

Warren Weber: Um, but it worked, I think it's worked out. I don't know, uh, you know, better than I as far as how that mix continues. Um, but that's one of the things that was fun to do and interesting to see in terms of who applied, [00:17:00] what their strengths were, how they matched up with the community,

how they matched up with the staff, how they matched up with the purpose of the library and how they would then expand that.

And I think, with both Barbara and Kathy, the two that I'm most familiar with, uh, they did very well.

Antonia Krupicka-Smith: Mm-hmm. I mean, it, it grew, uh, with Barbara, the Teen Center became part of the operation, with Kathy, we worked on the collection and worked on a variety of things to get more people to come in.

Mm-hmm.

Warren Weber: Uh, so, and they were both very good at working with boards.

Antonia Krupicka-Smith: Mm-hmm.

Warren Weber: Um, Listening and asking.

Antonia Krupicka-Smith: Mm-hmm

Warren Weber: You know, what, what do you hear? What should we do? Where do we go from here? Kinds of things and then also to pose ideas and so forth. Uh, so they were both solid in terms of their support and their [00:18:00] informing the board as to what's going on.

Antonia Krupicka-Smith: Mm-hmm.

Warren Weber: Um, Okay. Yeah. I don't know if I've lost the original question in there.

Antonia Krupicka-Smith: It's your memories. It's not, there's no questions. I am curious about, you know, it was 25 years ago, and anytime you do a lot of planning for something, you think you're gonna get everything right and then it happens and you open the doors, or you're in it for two years and then you're like, well, that was a big mistake.

Warren Weber: I remember the lights...

Antonia Krupicka-Smith: Any big mistake?

Warren Weber: The lights way on the high ceiling were an issue. Um, it was like, they, why don't they last longer than they do? Because getting one of those changed and or repaired was like, well, you gotta bring in this hydraulic thing and get somebody way up there. Some of that kind of stuff was like, Hmm. That was one of those glitches that, uh, nobody saw coming. Um mm. [00:19:00] That's, that's one thing I remember. I think the staff was really excited, uh, about they had more space. They could, things could find their proper place and not be stored in the basement of a building that was a hundred years old and with all kinds of creatures in the basement that nobody knew quite, what is that? And I don't think I want to go down there anymore. Um, so that was an exciting thing for staff is to, uh, have that happen.

The other thing that I think the board worked with, uh, well, okay. One was the keeping the technology current. Uh, technology that related to how patrons can interact with the library and where they can, how they can get access to whatever it is, magazines, newspapers, books, um, find out what's here, what's not [00:20:00] here. Keep up with schedules.

Um, the other thing was, uh, 9/11 and the safety acts that were passed by Congress. Uh, because it began to create issues of who's monitoring what in the way of patron use. And that became a real concern for the board. Uh, it was kind of a, uh, it would not kind of, it was a real issue, uh, in terms of is anybody going to be monitored if they come in and check out anything, whatever it is, online or in person.

Uh, and the board was very concerned about the confidentiality of that kind of transaction. Um, and of course at the time, I don't know if it's still the case, uh, the federal law [00:21:00] allowed for, whoever it was, Department of Defense or whoever it was to ask the library for various kinds of records. And the concern was, well, when are they gonna ask and what are they gonna ask for?

So, um, and yet, um, the director was in a position of saying, well, I can't even share with the board what some of the things are that people, you know, check out of the library. That's really a confidential arrangement between the patron and the library. So the shorthand signal was on every board agenda. It was stated, there had been no request for records by the federal government or whatever department it was.

So that was our confidence builder to say, okay, nobody's asked. We haven't had to provide. And I don't think it ever happened that the [00:22:00] library was asked while I was on the board that the library was ever asked for that kind

of information. Um, in the name of whatever it is, public safety or public security and that kind of thing.

Um, but it was, it generated a lot of conversation within the community about, uh, that and, and as technology grew, of course it allowed all kinds of access to the internet. And so there's all kinds of things on the internet, nastiness as well as other things. So the question was, should there be any kind of filtering?

And while I was on the board, the board always consistently said no. And um, I think the directors would've done it, had the board agreed. But the, and the directors, the two that I worked with most frequently both said, no, that's not a, I mean, you as a board can decide, but that's [00:23:00] not what I would recommend.

The board said, well, that's not what we would approve either. Um, and it was interesting because I, when I think I was president at the time, received a call from a staff member of a US House Representative who was no longer part of this part of the state, uh, um, saying we should filter. And I thought, well, that's interesting that a staff member from a US congressman's office would come forward and make that request.

My response was, you really need to talk to your boss because Congress has passed legislation that allows for a person to do, go anywhere on the internet for two hours, and then they must ask for permission to do another two hours. We do not filter anything they do. [00:24:00] So if you want something different, you really need to go talk to your boss because we're following national legislation.

Well, that was the end of the conversation and I don't think anymore came of it. But, uh, there was some people who wrote to the board and said, you know, you really ought to, you know, there's too much nastiness and so you really ought to, not allow that. And, uh, even if somebody walks by and sees something, and we understood that that might be offensive, but we also knew that, uh, you take one step in that direction and then it's difficult to stop and make continuing judgments on behalf of the community, uh, as to what should and shouldn't be allowed and not, and knowing that, even with the technology at the time, it would be difficult to do that because there'd always be these, is it an example of, or not an [00:25:00] example of this kind of offensive material or information. And offensive even what way? Um, so it really got to be, now it's just not a good idea. And, and we stayed with that while I was on the board.

Since I left the board, I have no idea what the conversations have been and what the decisions have been. But then we worked with that for a couple of years. Um, and, um, the board, no matter the members, uh, stayed consistent that it really, if we are about access, we are about access. And if you have a child who sees something that you don't want them to see, we would ask you to help us with, um, your child's travels through the library because we aren't there and the staff isn't always there. So it really is up to you to help the child [00:26:00] not see that if you don't want them to see that not go there, if you don't want them to go there.

Antonia Krupicka-Smith: Mm-hmm.

Warren Weber: Um, and then after a while the issue just sort of abated and it never, never lasted. And, uh, so we were, we were fi... we were fine at that point.

Antonia Krupicka-Smith: Yeah. Awesome. Well, I appreciate you chatting and sharing your memories.

Warren Weber: That's fine.

Antonia Krupicka-Smith: With building

Warren Weber: Yeah.

Antonia Krupicka-Smith: This building.

Warren Weber: Yeah. Yeah.

Antonia Krupicka-Smith: And everything associated with it.

Warren Weber: It was a, it was a fun time. I enjoyed the, the board and its work and uh, and the thought that everybody gave to all of that. And, um, uh, and it's really something significant for the community because the access to information and now more than ever, I mean, you can download whatever, books and materials and you can read the New Yorker magazine if you choose. [00:27:00] And uh, it's all there. And now with the lab upstairs and all the capabilities that has, I wasn't there then.

We thought the teen center was our big inno... one of our big innovations and

Antonia Krupicka-Smith: Mm-hmm

Warren Weber: that I think, I don't know what the service level is now. I don't know how many students actually take part, but then we had seemed like anywhere from 75 to a hundred students who were pretty regular coming in and being part of that.

So anyway.

Antonia Krupicka-Smith: Yeah.

Warren Weber: You're welcome.