

Library director Gay describes first month on the job

Says he's enjoying working with library staff, meeting community members

By Hannah Weikel
hweikel@conley.net.com
262-513-2651

WAUKESHA — Waukesha Public Library Director Bruce Gay was hired at the end of November to fill an open position left by former Director Grant Lynch earlier this year. Gay left his job as director of the Milwaukee County Federated Library System to join the Waukesha Public Library. Before that, he was the technical services and collections director at the Milwaukee Public Library for 11 years.

FREEMAN: So it's been over a month since you started in Waukesha, how has it been for you so far?

GAY: It's been great; staff has been really nice, very welcoming, showing me around, trying to help me learn what I need to know. I'm starting to meet members of the community and I'm really impressed by the level of support that the community gives the library here. I think it's really a nice thing to have a community really like their library.

FREEMAN: You previously oversaw an entire county system. What are the differences you've found at the helm of a single library?

GAY: My customers when I was director of the Milwaukee County Federated

Library System were the member libraries, specifically the library directors. They would come to me and ask for help. In this case, obviously my customers are the citizens of Waukesha.

FREEMAN: Has anything here been different from what you expected?

GAY: You go to a new job and ... you're not sure how it's going to go at first and you're a little anxious. I was a little anxious and what surprised me was how I've felt comfortable working with the people right from the first day. Both the staff and the public coming in. I've felt really good about the choice.

FREEMAN: When we spoke right after you were hired, you mentioned an interest in creating more public events at the library. Have you moved forward with anything like that?

GAY: What I've been able to learn since the time that I first talked to you; there's quite a bit of community outreach already going on at the library. We just finished a very interesting and exciting time in the children's department ... we had four different sessions of gingerbread house making and all of those were ... fully subscribed with waiting lists. We had little kids coming in and probably several hun-

dred made gingerbread houses with their families.

This will also be the 12th year of the Waukesha Reads program. Last year with "True Grit" we had something around 14,000 people attend different events associated with the program.

One of the things we will be doing this year is a new strategic plan for the library ... and that will involve focus groups and community input as much as possible.

FREEMAN: Is there a timeline for the new strategic plan?

GAY: We will ask for proposals in the next month. Consultants around the state or out of state. The plan could take six months, to do the full data gathering and community meetings and working with the strategic plan committee with writing and revising. By September, optimistically.

FREEMAN: What does the timeline look like with the automated book drop system?

GAY: We expect to have the book drop fully operational by the end of this month. Where we are right now is we're setting up all the different sorts of situations the book drop would have to deal with to check in or not check in different items and to sort them. So for instance, we receive books from Muk-



Hannah Weikel/Freeman Staff

New Waukesha Library Director Bruce Gay poses for a picture Wednesday morning on the library's first floor. Gay started his position on Nov. 29 and spoke to The Freeman about the job.

wonago, Menomonee Falls, all the other members of the library system. Some of those libraries have RFID systems themselves and many do not. So, if we get a library book in from Waukesha and it's on hold to go to Menomonee Falls, what's the path we need to set up in the code to have the book drop put it in the right place? Or if something comes in from Menomonee Falls and it doesn't read it, where is that going to go now? So we have to set up all these different kind of things ... we are going to list all the different scenarios we can think of and run them through the machine.

FREEMAN: Is library staff doing that?

GAY: Yes, library staff is doing that and working with the vendor.

FREEMAN: Were you aware of the book drop issues when you took the job here?

GAY: Oh yeah, I saw news stories about it.

FREEMAN: Is there anything else you're excited to do with your new position?

GAY: I do like to talk about the library as valuable to a community in three ways ... the first thing I think the library still has an important role to play is as champion of reading in the community. There's a report that shows very strong correlations between people who read are more likely to vote, people who read are more likely to exercise, people who read are more likely to volunteer ... so there's all these positive correlations

between reading. And that's something I think the Waukesha Public Library does a really good job of.

Second thing about a library is, a library is an important place for community because it's a place where people can meet and gather. It's an ideology-free meeting place that anyone from the banker to the baker could meet together.

Finally, I think it's really important that ... a library is a really great place for kids, because a library is the first place, when a kid gets a library card that's like the first entry into being a citizen of the community. So they have their library card and it shows I have responsibilities and I have rights and I can use this card just like anybody else and I think that's really important for a library.