

# Hardin helps improve the library

(As published in The Oak Ridger's Historically Speaking column the week of October 29, 2019)

Pat Hope brings us a fine article recognizing one of our most diligent workers supporting the Oak Ridge Public Library, Nancy Hardin. I have also had the pleasure to know and work with Nancy on the Friends of the Oak Ridge Public Library Board of Directors for several years. She is well deserving of the praise given her by Pat.

Enjoy learning more about Nancy's dedication from Pat's perspective:

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Cicero may have said "A room without books is like a body without a soul," but Nancy Hardin of Oak Ridge might change that to say, "A town without books is like a body without a soul," because books have meant a lot to her, and to Oak Ridge, for a very long time.

Nancy leads the Friends of the Oak Ridge Public Library (FOL) with a soft-spoken confidence and an unflinching dedication to providing whatever the library needs that is within FOL's ability to provide. "In an ideal world we would have a new building to serve all our present and future needs," she says. "Things like a listening room for CD's/DVD's, a screening room, a café, an area where teenagers could be noisy if they wanted, a larger room for Oak Ridge history. . . .my list could go on and on," says the petite lady with a quick smile who can pack a box of books with the best of them.

But then, when you've been involved with an organization for 50 years, you certainly know all the ins and outs of how it works. And if you've been president of that organization for more than a dozen years, you must be doing something right!

Ever since she accepted a job in Oak Ridge back in 1969, and in college before that, Nancy has served a public library in one form or another. She came to Oak Ridge from the University of Illinois where she received a Masters of Library Science degree, accepting a job as a librarian with the United States Atomic Energy Commission in its technical information division. She retired in 1995 with 34 years of service.

Nancy was born in San Antonio during World War II. Her dad was a trainer for the US Army/Air Force. After the war, he was a civilian meteorologist with the Air Force, eventually moving his family to Lebanon, IL.

Her mother's people were from the east Tennessee area, so when she was looking for a job out of college, she applied at the University of Tennessee, and they referred her to Oak Ridge.

Her goals for FOL include finding new ways to support the library, for example, "last year we obtained an Altrusa grant, which was used for Launch Pad computers in the Children's Room." In another outreach effort, Nancy participated in helping Frozen Head State Park (in Morgan County) set up a camp library.

"Our library needs lots of support," Nancy says, "Over the years, FOL has bought microfilm readers and computers, helped with City of Oak Ridge Oral Histories print versions, sponsored programs for the Children's Library's Summer Reading Program, bought a playhouse and Launchpads, chairs, shelving, and many publications, both print and non-print," adding, "When the budget is short, we can step in and replace things like outdated furniture and shelving, reference books, and more."

She points out that the public uses the library for recreational materials and inter-library loans but it also provides computers where you can do research or apply for a job and find other help such as income tax forms.

Julie Forkner, Oak Ridge Public Library Director says without Nancy and "our Friends," as she calls them, "The library could not be where it is now, and cannot get where it needs to go. Nancy's dedication to keeping FOL organized and running means that the library can bring in presenters for our popular Summer Reading Program, offer self-service check out options, and replace worn out furniture. We truly appreciate our Friends and what we've been able to accomplish with their help."

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FOL raises funds by recruiting members, holding three book sales per year and by managing two “book nooks” in the library lobby where donated books can be bought with an unspecified donation. “The book nooks plus the book sales increase our ability to help the library,” Nancy says, adding, “we keep trying different things, for example, we do many different silent auction items, to include rare or unusual books and collections but also things like globes, baby carriages, rocking chairs, all sorts of items donated to us or left at the library not claimed. We hope to continue to find ways to raise money and support the library.”

For people who don't think the library is a community necessity, Nancy has this advice, “Come visit our library for a day. See how many people use it, people of all ages and from all walks of life. The library can provide a place where children and adults can improve their reading skills. It's the social center of a community and our community would be pretty bleak without it.”

At its annual meeting, Nancy hands out FOL appreciation certificates to dozens of volunteers who help with sorting the books, boxing the books, serving on the board, and helping with the book nooks and sales.

“We encourage our FOL members to become involved with our efforts to support the library and they always come through for us. Hopefully, that won't ever change,” she says.

If books feed her soul, singing surely feeds her heart. Nancy has been with the Oak Ridge Chorus for more than 20 years. She sings soprano and is music librarian for the Chorus. She sings in her church choir, as well, and says “as long as I can remember, I've wanted to sing.”

She has been in TIC Talk Toastmasters for more than 10 years and notes that this experience has helped her very much as she has served the Friends and the Oak Ridge Public Library.

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Thanks, Pat, for insight into a true servant leader! Nancy Hardin is a treasure who is dedicated to her effective service of our library. Over the years she has consistently led the board of directors and I have been pleased to serve under her leadership.



Nancy Hardin, a true Servant Leader with focus on continually improving the support of the Oak Ridge Public Library by its Friends group