

Remembering “Big Lil”

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Speak Up!

Speak Out!

Speak for Libraries!

The NHLTA lost a good friend, mentor, and champion library advocate when Lillian “Big Lil” Edelmann passed away Jun 27, 2018. We all miss her energy and enthusiasm and pride in the NHLTA. She was a vital member of our organization for twenty- one years during which time she served as President and Vice-President and chaired many committees. My earliest memories of Lil stem from my attendance at NHLTA Annual Conferences. She was always a commanding figure speaking with emotion and passion and displaying that “fire in the belly.” You may remember hearing some of her other quotes such as “Libraries Are the Heartbeat of Democracy”, “Libraries are the citizens’ free university”, “knowledge is power”, and “Speak Up! Speak Out! and Speak for Libraries!”

Lil began advocating for libraries back in 1969 when she ran for trustee in Twin Mountain. For many years, she canvassed for libraries throughout the North Country citing their importance and what it meant to be a library trustee. She drove the Mediamobile that travelled the North Country to deliver books and tapes to people who couldn’t get to a library, and in 1991 received a commendation from Governor Judd Gregg for her work with “the Library Comes to You” project.

Lil, along with several other library supporters from the North Country, joined the NHLTA in 1992. Lil was immediately elected Vice-President for a two- year term and that was only the beginning. In 1994, she was elected President and was re-elected continuously for another nine years — then later in 2005 elected for a last two- year term. Lil chaired the Education Committee for many years, presided over the NHLTA 50th Anniversary Gala, was a member of the revision committee for the NHLTA Manual: A Guide for Library Trustees, represented the NHLTA on the NH Library Advisory Council when she attended meetings at the State Library, and promoted and participated in many conferences, workshops and library visits.

I don’t know if trustees today realize that there had been a proposal in 1993 to merge the NHLTA, NHLA and the ANHLF (Association of NH Library Friends) into one organization. Lil represented the NHLTA on that ad hoc committee by attending and reporting on many meetings over the next several years. Obviously, the merger never did happen.

Lil, demonstrating her legislative acumen and zeal for promoting the importance of libraries, was the driving force behind the movement of library supporters to successfully petition the state legislature to declare that New Hampshire libraries should remain autonomous from local government. RSA 202-A:6, which spells out that autonomy, was adopted April 16, 2000 and has well served many libraries since then.

Continuing to be recognized for her championship of libraries, Lil received several awards in 2002; the Dorothy M. Little Award which is given to someone who has demonstrated sustained extraordinary public library advocacy and activism on a local, regional, and state level, and NELA's Emerson Greenaway Award that recognizes distinguished service in librarianship. In 2009, the NHLTA Board of Directors paid their own tribute to Lil by renaming the Library Trustee of the Year Award to the Lillian Edelman Trustee of the Year Award.

In addition to her NHLTA activities, Lil reached out to other state boards and attended their events to advocate for libraries and library trustees. She attended conferences in Pennsylvania, Vermont, Texas and New York. Her good works were renowned throughout the library world as she received invitations to speak in Kentucky, West Virginia, Delaware and the cities of Augusta, Bangor and Portland in Maine. She also served as Regional Vice President of the ALA division of the American Library Trustees Association (ALTA) and was asked to chair the ALTA Legislative Committee.

When Lil decided to retire from the NHLTA Board of Directors in 2013, the other directors voted to appoint her as their first Emeritus Director. She only attended several meetings after her retirement but her love for libraries and the NHLTA continued.

We all miss Lil Edelman greatly and give thanks for her guiding support and pursuit of education for library trustees. Because of the energy, enthusiasm, and devotion that Lil gave to our trustees, the NHLTA is one of the strongest library trustee organizations in the country. ■

"Big Lil" chats with attendees at the 2011 NHLTA Conference



Terry Knowles with "Big Lil" at the 2012 NHLTA Conference

