



# Get to Know Your Library Board Candidates

We currently have four candidates running for four board positions in our upcoming Library Board Election that will take place, Tuesday, November 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2020. We have asked each of our candidates to answer a few questions to help you learn more about them.

1. Could you tell us a little about yourself and your familiarity with the Portage District Library's service area?
2. Why are you interested in serving as a library trustee?
3. What skills and abilities do you have related to serving as a trustee?

## Kenneth A. Baker

My qualifications for the position of Portage District Library (PDL) Board member are in three areas: Education, Experience and Passion. My family moved to the Portage/Mattawan area over twenty years ago and have enjoyed the schools and PDL. Stephen King would call me a "Constant Reader".

My **education** includes Bachelor of Science in Business Administration, Master of Business Administration (Concentrations of Marketing, Management and International Business Certificate), and Master of Education (Concentration Secondary), Teaching Certificate - Secondary Social Studies and Economics. These degrees honed my skills in group dynamics and forming consensus. Budgets are a part of this board's functions and understanding these areas were critical to those degrees.

**Experience** with the library and the community continues to enrich our family and better our futures. Our library provides my family with many needed services. My daughter uses the available online access, my wife has spent many quiet hours studying and I have enjoyed reading in the comfortable chairs. Leading my family in community charity experience has become a part of my character established back as an Eagle Scout. Special Olympics State Basketball tournaments are cherished annual events for not only officiating but score keeping as well. Being a sports official is my time to educate and promote good sportsmanship in grades 6-12. Communities need its members to work in organizations that provide more than the bare necessities. We are actively working in Portage Road 12 Baskets food pantry program.

**My passion** for books and this library include more than a personal belief. Cities are thriving when the educational opportunities constantly meet the needs of its residents. Once a student graduates lifelong learning takes place at the library. Books, media and other resources are used to update their knowledge base and stay current on their desired fields. For our democracy to work properly, certain information must be distributed in an effective

and consistent manner. Our society demands that a public library is a free service and available to its citizens. Therefore, our library is very important to the American public and must be maintained and board members must have a passion and integrity that we can trust.

## Michele Behr

**1. )** I have been a resident of Portage since 2001. Both of my children are products of the Portage Public Schools; my son is a senior at Northern, and my daughter graduated in 2018. I have been a member of the Board of Trustees since 2011 and am now seeking my third term. During my time on the Board, I served as Chair for two years and Vice Chair for four years. I have been employed by Western Michigan University since 2001, in various positions within the University Libraries. I have also served in numerous volunteer positions in the public schools and other community organizations. I earned a Bachelors and a Masters degree, both from the University of Michigan.

**2. )** Although I have been a life-long library user and supporter, my appreciation for the real value and impact of the Portage District Library began when my children were small and we were frequent visitors to the library. Eventually I felt that I wanted to become more involved and decided to run for a seat on the Board. Since becoming a member of the Board, I have been even more impressed with the PDL staff, the commitment to fiscal responsibility and judicious use of taxpayer money, and most importantly, the vital role the library plays in the community. I am interested in continuing to serve as a library trustee to provide continuity and experience as the library moves forward.

**3. )** During my time on the Board, I have learned a great deal about the operations of the Portage District Library in such areas as programming, technology, and outreach, as well as budgets and finances. In my professional life, I have over 35 years of experience working with libraries of all types and sizes. As a long-time resident of Portage, I also feel I have a good sense of the strengths as well as the needs of our community.

## Tom Vance

**1. )** A Portage resident for 31 years, and a retired public relations professional, I was a candidate for the Portage Library Board in 2018. Commissioned from Army ROTC at WMU, I served on active and reserve duty as an Army public affairs officer and retired from the Army Reserve as a lieutenant colonel. My civilian career includes public relations work at The Upjohn Company (and later Pharmacia & Upjohn), Biggs-Gilmore Communications (now VML), Portage Public Schools and Kalamazoo Community Foundation.

Aside from being a faithful user of the Library's services, my professional experience with PDL's service area comes from my 12 years as community relations manager at Portage Schools, which shares the same district boundaries as the Library. That job required extensive public outreach, including coordinating with my counterparts at both the Library and the City (winning our three organizations a governmental collaboration award from the Michigan Schools Public Relations Association). During my time with Portage Schools, I also worked with the Library's local historian on adding school district materials to the Portage Schools Collection of PDL's Heritage Room, including an oral history collection that was published in 2017 as a nonprofit project with all proceeds going to the Library's Portage Schools Collection.

**2. )** I appreciate the vital role that public libraries play in the quality of life of a community. I understand the importance of communication and customer service, and how citizen support and engagement fuel the current work – and the future – of the Library. These are challenging times for public services due to Covid-19, but also exciting times for PDL with the upcoming renovation and expansion. It would be an honor to serve in this capacity – in what would be my first elected office – to help PDL maintain its outstanding reputation while always applying continuous improvement.

**3. )** A lifetime of public relations work in both the public and private sectors, along with service on a variety of community boards, has prepared me for this challenge. My professional experience in community relations will be especially helpful. In addition to working community relations at Portage Schools, my first job at The Upjohn Company was in its community relations office, which involved coordination with local branches of government around key issues of importance to both the community and the company. Currently, I'm on the advisory board of WMU's Osher Lifelong Learning Institute and Portage School District's centennial committee. Previous board experience includes serving as president of the Portage Community Center, president of the Kalamazoo Chapter of the United Nations Association and chair of the Portage Park Board. Membership on other local boards includes United Way, Housing Resources, WMU Alumni Association and KRESA's Education-for-Employment Advisory Council.

## Linda Whitlock, Write-In Candidate\*

**1. )** As a resident of Portage for the past 35 years, I have had the opportunity to explore and enjoy this area thoroughly. When our sons were growing up, the Portage District Library was one of our regular destinations and we enjoyed the many services that are available.

Personally, I am an avid reader and lifelong learner and the library has helped support my interests. I am a recent retiree from MSU Extension where I enjoyed my position as a horticulture educator and coordinator of the MSU Extension Master Gardener Volunteer Program in southwest Michigan, making use of my lifelong interest in the natural world and growing plants.

**2. )** We are fortunate to have an excellent library in Portage, I believe. Even during our current pandemic, they have creatively continued to offer excellent service for all ages. I would like to help support the library staff as they face challenges in the future.

**3. )** I have experience serving on several boards including Portage Public Schools, Kalamazoo in Bloom, and First Congregational Church. I believe that I can offer strong organizational skills, my willingness to learn from others, compassion and creative problem solving skills.

*\* Interested parties still have the option to file as a write-in candidate for the Portage District Library Board in the November 3, 2020 election. To file as a write-in candidate, please make an appointment at the Portage City Clerk's office to fill out a Declaration of Intent before 4:00 PM on Friday, October 23, 2020. She can also answer any additional questions you may have about the process: Erica Eklov (269) 329-4511.*

*When voting for a write-in candidate, voters are strongly urged to write the candidate's name exactly as it was filed on their Declaration of Intent and make sure to note the write-in within the correct race (Portage District Library Board) on the ballot.*