LORI BELONGIA, BA, MA
by Deb Johnston

The Everett Roehl Marshfield Public Library became a reality because the community recognized and supported its need. It wouldn't exist without the donation of its namesake, Everett Roehl, the advocacy of Mayor Chris Meyer and the countless others who helped move the project forward. Standing out amongst the others was the tireless effort of a humble leader, former library director Lori Belongia, who rallied the community to the cause. Over the decade long project, she never lost sight of the goal to provide a state-of-the-art library for Marshfield's current residents, as well as for future generations.

For years, Lori – with the encouragement of the library board – nurtured the idea of renovating and improving the existing library space for future needs. The push towards a new building developed from a design charette held in July 2010, where all the conceptual designs created shared a common feature – locating a community/senior center in the existing library space and building a new library.

Over the next five years Lori facilitated and coordinated all phases of the new building design and construction with city officials and departments, library staff, community volunteers, donors, architects, and contractors. Ground was broken on July 31, 2015 and the new Everett Roehl Marshfield Public Library opened to the public with a ribbon cutting on September 6, 2016.

Karen Hocking, who with her husband Bill served as members of the new library's fundraising committee said, "Lori was an amazing leader in advancing the building project through a very lengthy process while continuing to manage the daily functions of the library."

Asked once, "What is unique about the culture of the Marshfield library?" Lori responded, "This library exists to find ways to say "yes" to the ideas, needs, and desires of our community. This is their library…. We are here to make this a better place to live, learn, work, and play. Of course, it's not possible to be and do all things, but we look for ways to collaborate, compromise, and bring other partners into the mix to concentrate on what we can do."

That "can do" attitude and willingness to collaborate with others was perhaps Lori's greatest strength as a leader at the library. While working as the library's adult services supervisor, Lori participated with the Marshfield History Project to create the two Marshfield history books --The Marshfield Story, Pieces of Our Past in 1997, and The Marshfield Story, Windows to Our Past in 2000. Project



Lori Belongia

Coordinator Don Schnitzler credited Lori's willingness to say "I can do that," as important to seeing both books published. She helped with typing, editing, proofreading, promotion and indexing. Schnitzler added, "Most importantly indexing, Lori's push for a thorough index greatly enhanced the value of both books, by improving their usability."

In 2006, the library joined the Historic Preservation Month Planning Committee, a collaboration of local historical associations, societies and groups, to increase awareness and interest in local historic records and education. Three activities have been hosted at the library each year during Historic Preservation Month -- the "Marshfield Past, Present and Future," middle school students art exhibit was originally coordinated by Lori and middle school art instructor, Eric Nelson; a Community History Program, which has since evolved into the monthly Spoken History lecture series; and an introductory family history workshop. Lori's collaborations also extended beyond Marshfield's boundaries as seen in efforts related to the Wood County Veteran's Memorial Project in 2007 and adoption of the LZ Lambeau Viet Nam Veteran's Obituary Project for orphan counties in 2010.

Lori's tireless efforts on behalf of the library and community have been recognized in the past. In 1997, as the adult services supervisor and assistant library director, Lori was named Main Street Marshfield Downtown Employee of the year. In 2008, under her leadership as library director, the library earned the Governor's Archive for Archival Achievement Award. It recognized the library's continued work to build a local historical and genealogical collection in a variety of formats and the community partnerships that led to the publication of two Marshfield Community Stories Projects in 2006 and 2007. Lori was recognized in 2016, with the John Christner Local Historian Award for her

contributions to the Marshfield History Project and longstanding commitment and support of collecting and protecting historical records for Marshfield and the surrounding communities. Later that same year, Lori also received a Marshfield People of the Year Award for her efforts related to the new Everett Roehl Marshfield Public Library.

In 2020, just prior to Lori's retirement from the library, Friends of the Marshfield Public Library shared stories, poems, and music about remarkable people when their annual Timeless Tales presented "People Who Make a Difference!" As readings and performances neared the end, Jean Swenson, FOMPL member and former library board president, called Lori to the stage and highlighted some of ways in which she had made a difference here during her 33 years of service at the library. In closing remarks Jean said, "Lori made Marshfield more beautiful by planting the seeds of reading for kids and adults, which blossomed into our new library and community center. She has made a difference and for that we are grateful."