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Don Behm

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Library board rejects restrictions

Group wanted to limit books with sex themes

By Don Behm of the Journal Sentinel

June 2, 2009

Gary Porter

West Bend - The Library Board on Tuesday night unanimously rejected efforts by a local citizen group to restrict access of young adults to books depicting sex among teenagers or those describing teenage homosexual relationships.

Such books already are separated from children's books, either in a young adult fiction section on the first floor of the library or shelved as young adult non-fiction alongside similar adult texts on the second floor, board members said.

The nine-member board listened for 2½ hours as nearly 60 people discussed the appropriateness of the library providing such books to the public before the board voted to maintain current policies.

Speakers were evenly divided between those offended by graphic details of teenage sexual encounters contained in some books and those opposing censorship.

Several people said parents should take responsibility for reviewing what their middle school and high school students were reading from the library.

Tuesday's meeting was held in the gymnasium at McLane Elementary School with seating for 600 people, but only one-third that number showed up for the debate.

Ginny and Jim Maziarka of West Bend earlier this year asked the community board to remove books that the couple considers to be obscene or child pornography from a section of the library designated "Young Adults." The couple formed an organization, West Bend Citizens for Safe Libraries, to promote their views.

The Maziarkas requested such books to be reclassified and placed in a restricted area requiring parental approval before being released to a child. The books also should be labeled with a warning about content, the couple said.

Ginny Maziarka in past interviews described two of the targeted books - "The Perks of Being a Wallflower" and "The Geography Club" - as explicitly sexual. She considers a third book, "Deal With It! a whole new approach to your body, brain and life as a gURL" to be pornographic.

"Sexually explicit content should not be on the teen shelf in the West Bend Library," Ginny Maziarka said.

On Tuesday, the Maziarkas submitted names of around 700 citizens on petitions supporting their requests.

The petition also asks the Library Board to balance its collection of books about homosexuality with books "affirming traditional heterosexual perspectives" that are faith-based or written by "ex-gay" authors.

On Tuesday, Ginny Maziarka told the board that if they rejected her petition that she would not consider the library a safe place for children.

West Bend resident Maria Hanrahan started a group, West Bend Parents for Free Speech, to oppose the Maziarkas' requests.

Hanrahan circulated a separate petition. On Tuesday, she submitted 1,068 signatures supporting existing library policies.

This petition asks the Library Board to protect the library's collection from attempts at censorship, to reject requests to reclassify or move materials on the basis that some patrons find the content objectionable, and to reject requests to label certain books based on sexual content.

"We believe that library patrons are fully responsible for making their own determinations about what materials are appropriate for themselves or their children," Hanrahan told a Journal Sentinel reporter in explaining why she took the action.

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