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Patrons defend library under bloggers' assault

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- Written by Tim Hadac
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After two weeks of headline-grabbing allegations against the Orland Park Public Library made by two right-wing political activists, local library patrons had their say Monday night.

Opinions were offered at the library board of trustees meeting attended by more than 50 people at the library, 14921 S. Ravinia Ave.

The core issue is whether or not the library should attempt to block pornography by installing filters on its computers that offer Internet access to adults, but some in the audience directed their anger at activists Megan Fox, of Mokena, and Kevin DuJan, of Chicago, for their sharp and ongoing criticism of library staff.

In an emotional statement, Orland Park resident Tomasz Kusmider described how his son Mike, 14, and daughter, Julie, 4, have practically “grown up” in the library, located just a five-minute walk from their home.

He heaped praise on librarians and other staff, and with his voice growing louder in anger and the papers in his hands shaking, Kusmider blasted Fox and DuJan for what he described as slandering and hurting library staff.

He said he was speaking at the meeting because “we owe this to ourselves, the silent, sane majority. We owe this to our children, who are too young to defend their [library] guardians and educators.”

At one point, mere feet away from Fox and DuJan (who were seated in the front row with some supporters), Kusmider looked at them with contempt, averted his eyes and said, “I cannot even look at you.”

Kusmider ran well over his allotted time and was asked by the board to stop his statement as the meeting temporarily got out of hand, with yelling by several people in the audience and Fox objecting to what she called a personal attack.

Fox, a self-described “Christian conservative prude,” also offered comment at the meeting and essentially re-stated her previous claims that the library’s adult Internet viewing area is a “giant porn hole” and “masturbation lounge” that endangers the safety of children in the building.

Seated next to her was DuJan, originally from Cleveland who describes himself on his website as a “conservative, Christian gay man residing in the rainbow-tinted neighborhood of Chicago known as Boystown.”

He criticized library staff, particularly for recent statements to the press that he characterized as misleading at best and outright lies at worst.

Also at the meeting was a quartet of representatives from the American Library Association, who spoke against filters as tools that deny people access to information and often fail to block pornographic websites.

Before the public comments began, Board President Nancy Healy read a statement assuring all that the library has “very strong safety measures in place to protect all library patrons, especially children, from exposure to illegal or obscene material on the Internet.”

She added that the library has recently taken steps designed to tighten procedures, including requiring adult Internet users to present a picture ID that is kept at the help desk while they use library computers to use the Internet.

Not discussed by anyone at the meeting was the issue of how easily anyone — children included — can and do circumvent Internet filters every day.

“Porn is gross, I agree with that,” said Tiffany, a 17-year-old library patron who declined to give her last name and offered comment in the building’s lobby. “But you can’t stop people from looking at what they want.”

She added that students at her school routinely get around filters by using proxy servers that are readily available online.

“Plus, you could put [Internet] filters on the [adult] computers in this library or any library,” she continued. “But so what? People can just come in with their own devices — a laptop or a tablet or a smart phone — tap into the [taxpayer funded] WiFi at the library and go to any website they want. Don’t [adults] know that?”

In the end, trustees neither proposed nor took any action relating to Internet filters. Later in the meeting, after emerging from executive session, they passed, on a 4-2 vote, a 2014 budget that calls for a 3.75 percent levy increase.

Fox’s complaints against the library appear to stem from what she describes as inappropriate treatment she received from library staff in early October. She has written that “...none of this would have happened if the librarian who rudely chased me out of the children’s area (like an angry ghost haunting the stacks) would have just let me use a computer there like I had very nicely asked.”

As a right-wing blogger, Fox has criticized librarians in general as “purveyors and pushers of porn...they actively want your kid to have access to any manner of graphic pornography without your consent or knowledge.”

She has also examined whether “single mothers are destroying kids and society,” claimed that public schools are “modern altars for child sacrifice,” and described global warming as a “dubious scientific tall tale.”

In her Facebook profile, she notes that she is “researching a new book on the indoctrination of children and anti-Americanism in Illinois’ public high schools.”

Fox appears to relish the attention her OPPL criticisms have generated, likening herself to a mama bear defending her cubs. “I’m semi-versed in media tactics, and I abhor evil with such passion that I won’t let go when I know I’m right, until the threat is vanquished or I’m dead.”

“I’ve grabbed the tail of Leviathan, and it’s going to be a hell of a ride.

"I'm a mom with a talent for stringing words together in a way that makes people want to read more," she also wrote.



Framed by activists Kevin DuJan of Chicago (foreground, from left) and Megan Fox of Mokena, Orland Park resident Tomasz Kusmider praises Orland Park Public Library staff and insists that in the thousands of hours he has spent at the library in recent years he has never seen anything "criminal or obscene" on library computers used by others.