

11-5-2014

# Case Study Analysis: OPPL spending on Robin Wagner/Wendy Xie Syracuse Adventure in October 2014

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## Recommended Citation

Fox, Megan, "Case Study Analysis: OPPL spending on Robin Wagner/Wendy Xie Syracuse Adventure in October 2014" (2014).  
*Orland Park Public Library (Illinois), 2013*. Paper 253.  
[http://dc.uwm.edu/orland\\_park\\_library\\_challenge/253](http://dc.uwm.edu/orland_park_library_challenge/253)

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**Case Study Analysis: OPPL spending on Robin Wagner/Wendy Xie Syracuse Adventure in October 2014**  
November 5, 2014 at 1:40pm



Watch the animated version of "Robin & Wendy's Excellent Adventure"  
here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tdRsR2kROJw>

Recently, we used the Freedom of Information Act to obtain documents related to a trip that Library Assistant Director Robin Wagner and sidekick Wendy Xie took to Syracuse, New York (in October 2014). Let's analyze what they spent on this trip and see if the public benefitted at all

from spending so much taxpayer money on transporting, housing, and feeding these two individuals in arguably one of the most glamorous cities in New York state (aside from Manhattan...and Rochester...and Albany...and Buffalo) for four days.

**Document #1: \$600.00 Invoice for Robin Wagner and (Guest) Wendy Xie for Polaris conference attendance**

So, it cost \$600 total just to get Robin and Wendy in through the door for this Polaris event. Now, this is not a conference about the 1960s and 1970s ballistic missile system Polaris, but some kind of library thing. At first blush, it would seem okay to send these people to a library related event (as opposed to sending them to something on ballistic missiles), but let's think about this for a minute: why does it cost \$600 for them to learn about something that the Library is paying for? Polaris is a system that the Library is paying to use to be part of some kind of book-sharing thing. So, Polaris is a for-profit company that is receiving tax money on a regular basis for the Library to use this system. Why would the OPPL have to pay to have two employees learn how to use a system that they are paying a monthly or annual fee to use? Wouldn't that kind of be like if you leased a car and had to pay money each month for a lease...but the car dealership also made you pay \$600 for you and a sidekick to go and learn about how to drive the car? Makes no sense.

Also, since the fee to learn about Polaris was so high...was it really necessary to have both Robin and Wendy go? Why couldn't the two of them have held a contest on who takes the best notes and gives the best account of presentations. They could have done this in a fun way, by maybe putting a movie on in a meeting room at the Library and then taken notes on it. Whoever was deemed to have most accurately recounting the movie in her notes would have won the chance to go to Syracuse. The expectation being that this woman would be the best one to take excellent notes and come back to tell everyone at the Library about Polaris. So instead of sending a note-taker plus a sidekick, the OPPL could have just sent the best note-taker they had and saved at least \$300 on registration fees alone.

[View invoice online](#)

Polaris Users Group  
Event registration

Invoice number: 00766  
Issued: Monday, July 21, 2014

Bill to:  
Robin Wagner  
rwagner@orlandparklibrary.org  
Orland Park Public Library

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Item	Amount
Registration for "PUG 2014 Annual Meeting & Conference" (Wednesday, October 08, 2014 9:00 AM - Friday, October 10, 2014 5:00 PM (EDT), Syracuse, NY), PUG Member Full Conference Registration-Early Bird Pricing through July 31,2013	\$300.00
(Guest 1) Wendy Xie	\$300.00
<b>Total: \$600.00</b>	
<b>Balance Due: \$600.00</b>	

To pay by check, print your invoice and send a copy of the invoice with your check to:

Polaris Users Group  
119 E. Green St.  
Ithaca, NY 14850

[Click here for a signed W-9 form](#)

[View invoice online](#)

Now, let's pause for a minute and wonder why there was a need to go to Syracuse New York in the first place. It's the year 2014. Why couldn't Robin or Wendy have learned about Polaris via YouTube videos or done Skype/FaceTime with someone at Polaris and received instructions that way? Why was there a need to travel anywhere when everything today can be done virtually? It's a computer system we are talking about here. You mean to tell me that a computer system cannot be learned about through videos and Skyping over the computer? That's not credible.

The other issue is that people around the country come to Chicago for training. Chicago, in fact, is one of the top training destinations in the country. People who live in Syracuse get sent to Chicago for training. So, why are two public employees in Chicagoland being sent to Syracuse for training? You mean to tell us that there was no Polaris training to be found in Chicago? It's not credible that Syracuse is the only place this training happens. There has to be Polaris training in Chicago.

The OPPL should have banded together with other Illinois libraries and demanded that the Polaris company fly out a trainer to do this event in our area. That would have been much less expensive, as librarians from all around Chicagoland could have gotten the training for a fraction of the cost of sending people like Robin and Wendy to Syracuse for the training.

**Document #2: \$544.40 in airfare to Syracuse for Robin and Wendy's Big Adventure**

When you add the airfare to the conference admission fees, you are now at \$1,144.40 to send two people to New York state for training that they should have been able to do in Chicago for about \$30 tops. Are costs like this justifiable when the Library claims it is broke and has to QUADRUPLE the tax levy just to break even? People who claim they are broke should not be sending people on \$1,144.40 trips to one of the most romantic and picturesque cities in the Empire State.

# Syracuse

Oct 7, 2014 - Oct 10, 2014 | Itinerary # 180725194928

## Important Information

- Remember to bring your itinerary and government-issued photo ID for airport check-in and security.

## Chicago (ORD) → Syracuse (SYR)

Oct 7, 2014 - Oct 10, 2014 , 2 round trip tickets

CONFIRMED

American Airlines

ADJWXI

Your reservation is booked and confirmed. There is no need to call us to reconfirm this reservation.

## Price Summary

### Traveler Information

**Robin Wagner**  
Adult      No frequent flyer details provided      Ticket # 0017467404942

**Wendy Xie**  
Adult      No frequent flyer details provided      Ticket # 0017467404943

<b>Traveler 1: Adult</b>	<b>\$272.20</b>
Flight	\$226.97
Taxes & Fees	\$45.23
<b>Traveler 2: Adult</b>	<b>\$272.20</b>
Flight	\$226.97
Taxes & Fees	\$45.23
Expedia Booking Fee	\$0.00

**Total: \$544.40**

\* Seat assignments, special meals, frequent flyer point awards and special assistance requests should be confirmed directly with the airline.

All prices quoted in US dollars.

**Oct 7, 2014** - Departure Nonstop

Total travel time: 1 h 40 m

custom air icon	Chicago	Syracuse	1 h 40 m 602 mi
	<b>ORD 10:00am</b>	<b>SYR 12:40pm</b>	
	American Airlines	2753 Operated by ENVOY AIR AS AMERICAN EAGLE	

## Additional Flight Services

- The airline may charge additional fees for checked baggage or other optional services.

### Documents #3 and #4 and #5: \$549.99 in hotel, food, taxi, and other miscellaneous expenses for Robin & Wendy's Syracuse Sojourn

Okay, so now we are at a total of  $\$600.00 + \$544.40 + \$549.99 = \$1,694.39$  to send Robin and Wendy to Syracuse. It looks like Robin and Wendy shared a hotel room and stayed at a reasonably priced Holiday Inn. However, it was strange that they booked a room at the \$150 rate when they could have acquired a government rate of \$86.00/night, since they are government employees and hotels are compelled to honor the government rate for all government employees (be they federal, county, or local). Maybe Robin and Wendy don't know about the government rate, but Holiday Inn does indeed offer it. Instead, they paid the conference rate of \$150.00 when they could have saved some taxpayer money by insisting on the government rate of \$86.00.

PLEASE MAKE CHECK PAYABLE TO

Robin O. Wagner

AMOUNT

\$549.99

104620

DUG Conference

10-7 thru 10-10-14

EXPLANATION

- 10-7-14 Taxi - Syracuse Airport to Hotel - R. Wagner & W. Xie \$26.00
- 10-7-14 Lunch - R. Wagner & W. Xie - Ruby Tuesday \$32.54
- 10-8-14 Dinner - R. Wagner & W. Xie - KFC \$14.01
- 10-7 thru 10-10-14 Hotel - R. Wagner & W. Xie - Holiday Inn \$477.44
- 10-7-14 Mileage to W. Xie then Ottawa 45.5 mi = \$25.48
- 10-10-14 Mileage from Ottawa to W. Xie to OPPL 45.5 mi = \$25.48

\$600.95

REQUESTED BY:

Robin O. Wagner

DEPARTMENT

Admin

APPROVED



# Holiday Inn

10-10-14

<b>Robin Wagner</b>	Folio No. :	Room No. : 329
[REDACTED]	A/R Number :	Arrival : 10-07-14
US	Group Code : PUG	Departure : 10-10-14
	Company :	Conf. No. : 63916831
	Membership No. : [REDACTED]	Rate Code : IBMTH
	Invoice No. :	Page No. : 1 of 1

Date	Description	Charges	Credits
10-07-14	Niagara Room Dinner - Food Line# 329 : CHECK# 0012729	26.57	
10-07-14	Package Rate	150.29	
10-08-14	Package Rate	150.29	
10-09-14	Package Rate	150.29	
10-10-14	American Express		477.44
<b>Total</b>		<b>477.44</b>	<b>477.44</b>
<b>Balance</b>		<b>0.00</b>	

Thank you for staying with us! Qualifying points for this stay will automatically be credited to your account. Please tell us about your stay by writing a review here - [www.lhgrewardsclub.com/review](http://www.lhgrewardsclub.com/review). We look forward to welcoming you back soon.

**Guest Signature:** \_\_\_\_\_

I have received the goods and / or services in the amount shown heron. I agree that my liability for this bill is not waived and agree to be held personally liable in the event that the indicated person, company, or associate fails to pay for any part or the full amount of these charges. If a credit card charge, I further agree to perform the obligations set forth in the cardholder's agreement with the issuer.

For food, Robin and Wendy didn't splurge. Ruby Tuesdays is a good place for them to have eaten and they didn't go overboard. KFC is also very reasonable. It looks like possibly they either bought some meals on their own and did not ask for reimbursements or some meals were included with the conference price. So that was a savings as well. The taxi fare to and from the airport in Syracuse seems fair...but we think it's ridiculous that they are forever charging taxpayers for gas mileage reimbursements. We know that "everyone does it", but considering that Robin and Wendy got a free trip to one of New York state's treasures they should have picked up their own gas mileage to the airport (where taxpayers were already paying for them to fly across the country, stay in a hotel, and eat on the public dime).

1055 / IN NORTH STREET  
Liverpool  
(315)457-1500

Ruby Tuesday #7430  
9613 Carousel Center  
Syracuse, NY 13290  
(315) 466-1705

Ticket #4219  
2014-10-08 5:33 PM  
F428084 4 154 4219

936 Jacque N  
-----  
Tbl 303/1 Chk 7976 Gst 2  
Oct07'14 02:19PM  
\*\*\* Reprint \*\*\*  
-----  
\*\*\* Guest 1 \*\*\*  
1 ICE TEA UNSWEET 2.59  
1 TRIPLE PRIME X 10.29  
Tax Coll 1.03 Total Due 13.91  
-----  
\*\*\* Guest 2 \*\*\*  
1 ICE TEA UNSWEET 2.59  
1 BACON CHEESE X 9.49  
SUB SWT POT FRY\$ 1.00  
Tax Coll 1.05 Total Due 14.13  
-----  
\*\*\*\*\* All \*\*\*\*\*  
Sub Total 25.96  
Tax Collect 2.08  
Total Due 28.04

Cashier: Sam  
-----  
LICIOUS OR CMB 5.69  
+ Sm Msh/Grvy  
+ Md Pepsi Drnk  
1P ML EC WHT 5.99  
Breast  
+ Sm CSlaw  
+ Sm Swt Corn  
+ Biscuit  
ADD A MD DRINK 1.29  
+ Md Pepsi Drnk  
-----  
TAX 1.04  
CARRY OUT \$14.01  
-----  
CASH PRE-KEYED \$20.01  
Change \$6.00

\*\*\*\*\*  
Buy-One-Get-One 50% Off  
ON YOUR NEXT VISIT!

SHARE YOUR FEEDBACK WITH US AT  
WWW.TELLRUBYTUESDAY.COM  
VIA COMPUTER OR SMARTPHONE  
WITHIN THE NEXT 9 DAYS

Thank You

In terms of food spending, Robin and Wendy were certainly better than Mary Weimar and Bridget Bittman. Those two regularly rack up huge bills in restaurants or charge taxpayers for weird things like \$5.00 here for cinnamon creme cake and a pop or lunchtime treats from Chipotle or Corner Bakery, just because they don't feel like dipping into their own wallets for the goodies. Robin and Wendy seem to have actively tried to limit their spending on food...and we're glad for that. They are definitely not the norm at the OPPL in that regard.

**FINAL ANALYSIS: OPPL claims Robin and Wendy learned nothing, took no notes, and brought nothing back from the conference.**

A big problem we have with this Syracuse trip, and why we think it was wasted, was that the OPPL insists that Robin and Wendy took no notes while they were there and that they brought back nothing from the conference. We specifically FOIA-ed their notes, their learnings from this trip, and anything they brought back from the trip. We also asked for anything they prepared as a report or presentation to give to others when they got back...and for any report they gave the Board on what they learned on their \$1,694.39 sojourn in Syracuse. The OPPL says they learned nothing, took no notes, and brought nothing back. They also claim that Robin and Wendy didn't

share any learnings with anyone, didn't give any presentations, and didn't do a presentation for the Board.

The public should have a big problem with this.

Technically, there's no documentation proving that Robin and Wendy actually attended this conference. Yes, they paid for registration (to the tune of \$600.00) but they did not produce any ID badges, conference wristbands, conference agendas, etc. So, conceivably they could have just used the Polaris training as an excuse to have a Thelma & Louise style adventure in the Empire State. Fly into Syracuse with the conference as an excuse....and then have a devil-may-care adventure for three days on taxpayers. While it's not probable that they did this, it is possible since we have no proof that they went to a single training session or event at the conference. They could have sat in their room the whole time watching TV or having pillow fights. The OPPL has not established otherwise and has a duty to do just that.

It's bizarre that two people spent \$1,694.39 for a four day excursion to Syracuse but took no notes. So, there was nothing worthwhile that was said in those four days that would have warranted note-taking? Maybe the two of them have photographic memories. But is that likely? If someone does not take notes at a conference when it's a private company footing the bill, that person is deemed unworthy of attending future conferences. In the private sector, if an employer foots the bill for \$1,694.39 worth of business trip, the company expects to see notes from the trip, a binder brought back from the conference, and a presentation and report on learnings to be shared with other employees.

At the OPPL, in contrast, people like Robin and Wendy are sent to these events but they bring back no learnings. They claim they took no notes and learned nothing. They refuse to show any proof they actually attended the events of the conference and didn't just sit in their rooms the whole time, staring at each other for hours and daring the other one not to laugh or challenging each other to belching contests.

Have you ever heard of anything as ridiculous as these people insisting that they take no notes, bring nothing back, and learn nothing from these expensive conferences?

That's why this is such a total waste to send people like Robin and Wendy to these things. Here, the OPPL cries that it has to raise the tax levy (QUADRUPLE IT) and we see that \$1,694.39 was wasted sending Robin and Wendy to Syracuse, when the Library could have just sent two large potatoes or two unwanted Halloween pumpkins to Syracuse by FedEx, have them sit there for four days, and ship them back again. That would have cost maybe \$50 total for the two potatoes or two pumpkins (depending on weight).

And the OPPL would have received just as many learnings, notes, and documents out of the trip as they did with Robin and Wendy.