

Western New York Library Resources Council

The Excellence in Library Service Award

Donna Shine would be an excellent choice to receive “The Excellence in Library Service Award”.

I have known Donna Shine for over 50 years. We attended the West Seneca Central School district together. I was a year ahead of Donna but we shared many friends. Donna was always a good student with varying skills and talents. I remember she was an art major and her drawing and painting skills were remarkable. She also had a gift for poetry.

Twenty some years later we met at the Buffalo Irish Festival and renewed an old friendship. At the time I was writing genealogical articles for the *Buffalo Irish Times* newspaper. I was asked to write genealogical and Irish family research articles for Buffalo’s Irish Community that was asking questions and looking for answers related to Irish genealogical research. Buffalo did not have an organized society or group helping Buffalo’s Irish population. Donna had read some of my articles and was wondering if the writer was the same Kevin O’Brien she knew in high school. I did not know that Donna had an interest in Irish history before our meeting at the festival.

This was in August 1997 and after a few meetings with Donna and her husband Jim Shine another school class mate of mine, we sat down and talked about the need of an Irish Genealogical Society in Buffalo, New York.

So in the Fall of 1997 we started the **Buffalo Irish Genealogical Society**, better known as **BIGS**. I was the president of the society and Donna assumed the secretary/treasurer position. The group quickly grew to 100 members and that is when the organizational skills of Donna Shine were needed to keep the society going forward.

Shortly after this time the directors of the Buffalo Irish Center offered support and encouraged the goals of BIGS. The Buffalo Irish Center was hoping to start a library at the center. Donna was approached to “help” set up a library that would consist of books that were recently donated to the Irish Center. To the best of my knowledge Donna did not have any experience with the organization or operations of a library.

On my next visit to the Buffalo Irish Center, I stopped into the meeting/coat room and found it transformed into what you would have to describe as a library. The room now is known by everyone as the “Library”. Donna along with the help of her husband, Jim transformed this meeting-storage-coat room into what is now a well organized library. There were bookshelves,

books, genealogical periodicals, a computer, a printer and furniture in the “library” that were not there before.

I don’t know exactly how Donna put this all together but I know she has hundreds and perhaps thousands of volunteered hours into cataloging, organizing and building the library at the Buffalo Irish Center at 245 Abbott Road. I know Donna set up the library hours for research and genealogical help. There is also a system in place to borrow books and accept donations. The library is now the pride of the Buffalo Irish Center and is now the first room shown to visitors at the Irish center.

The success of the Buffalo Irish Center Library came to a point where there just wasn’t any more room for books and an opportunity was offered to the BIGS organization to move the genealogical research section of the library to a new location at the Heritage DiscoveRY Center on Lee Street in Buffalo, owned by the Western New York Railway Historical Society.

This would not have happened without the vision and tenacity of Donna Shine. It has been a few years now and I know what work Donna did at the Buffalo Irish Center has continued at the Heritage DiscoveRY Center but at a much larger scale.

Hard work and a commitment by Donna Shine and help from her friends have given the Western New York community two libraries.

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Respectfully,

Kevin J O’Brien
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