

Minnesota Coalition on Government Information

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James Madison Award
American Library Association
Washington Office
1301 Pennsylvania Avenue Northwest
Suite 403
Washington, DC 20004-1701

Members of the Selection Committee:

As members of the Minnesota Coalition on Government Information we nominate the Coalition for the 2005 Eileen Cooke State and Local Madison Award. In many ways, Eileen Cooke has been our inspiration from the outset. This award reminds us of how she continues to influence us in so many subtle and implicit ways.

Eileen Cooke took pride in the fact that she was a native Minnesotan and lifelong member of the Minnesota Library Association – and we took pride in her! Because she was Director of the ALA Washington Office – and possibly because of our common heritage -- many her fellow Minnesota librarians and our colleagues felt special interest in the work of ALA-WO. We internalized the tenets of the White House Conference on Libraries, and we understood early on that the role of government was not just to provide money but to assure access to information. We rejoiced when ALA took the lead in establishing the Coalition on Government Information. As individuals and agencies we joined that national coalition.

We soon realized that we faced challenges at the state and grassroots levels. Metronet, the multitype library network, took the lead in convening a circle of interest. In tandem with the national coalition we agreed to establish the Minnesota Coalition on Government Information, self-described as “a coalition of individuals and institutions dedicated to open access to information. The Coalition represented a diverse network of individuals and agencies committed to access in fullest sense and to the role of the state as producer,

collector, regulator and provider of access. A dynamic organization, always in flux, the Coalition includes state agencies, librarians and libraries, representatives of the press, computer professionals, information providers, archivists, and others who care about the issues.

On March 16, 1989, the Minnesota Coalition on Government Information announced the recipient of our first Freedom of Information Award. The recipient of that award, Mary Alice Harvey, Director of the Grand Marais Public Library, was honored at a celebratory event in the Rotunda of the Minnesota State Capitol. Keynote speaker for the event was John R. Finnegan, editor of the St. Paul Pioneer Press and national champion of access who, in 2001, was inducted into the national Freedom of Information Hall of Fame.. Since 1989 the Minnesota award has been known as the John R. Finnegan Freedom of Information Award.

Since 1989 the Coalition gathers in a public place on March 16 to honor the awardee and to reflect on the legacy of James Madison. We have met at the State Law Library, the Minnesota Judicial Center, the Minneapolis Public Library, and several times in the Rotunda of the Minnesota State Capitol where our most memorable celebration included drumming by a host of Native Americans recently returned from a meeting with fellow resistance members in Ireland.

A break in the routine was made in 2003, when the decision was made to recognize the efforts of Minnesota senator Mark Dayton during his tenure as chair of the Joint Committee on Printing in the 107th Congress. Senator Dayton called a hearing on the administration's proposal to bypass the long-standing laws regarding government printing, a proposal that would have, among other things, undermined the Federal Depository Library Program (FDLP). The award was to be presented at the annual conference of the Minnesota Library Association, providing more visibility for the award and an opportunity for the senator to speak on the issue of public access to information. However, at the last minute he was held

in Washington for a vote. The award was later presented to the senator in his office in Washington by a delegation of Minnesota depository librarians.

At the moment we are gearing up for the 2005 event and recognition of the work of Donald Gemberling, long-time champion of thoughtful attention to privacy issues. He retired in May, 2004, from the Minnesota Department of Administration. A 2002 cover story in the *City Pages* newspaper described his influence as follows:

Gemberling, who bears the unwieldy title of Director of the Information Policy Analysis Division at the Minnesota Department of Administration, is technically a midlevel bureaucrat with no formal policy – or rulemaking authority. But by dint of an encyclopedic knowledge of the history and philosophic underpinnings of the Data Practices Act, he has become its guru. Since 1974, when the Legislature passed the first incarnation of the law, Gemberling has weighed in on virtually every significant debate affecting its makeup, subtly and sometimes not so subtly shaping the ways the state government handles the ever-increasing volume of information it collects and maintains.

The Coalition will join to present our 16th award at the Minnesota History Center on March 16, the 2005 Freedom of Information Day.

Though the players and the agencies have changed since 1989, the mission of the Minnesota Coalition on Government Information remains firm. The work of the Coalition members keeps the flame alive and the issues on the public agenda. The spirit of Eileen Cooke, and her gentle but persistent nudge, remind us that this work is essential and it is ours.

Thank you for your consideration of this nomination. We would be happy to supply more details on any of the past recipients, or materials from any of the presentations.

Sincerely,

Members of the Minnesota Coalition on Government Information

Marvin Anderson Eileen McCormack

Helen Burke Laurel Stiebler

Marilyn Cathcart Robert Thornton

John R. Finnegan Mary Treacy

Robbie LaFleur Julia Wallace

Enclosures (5)