July 21, 2017 was a day filled with both happiness and sadness as I attended the retirement event for Mary Ellen Pellington, the director of the Octavia Fellin Public Library in Gallup, New Mexico for the past eight years. Her last day on the job will be August 01 but her legacy will last forever.

As is her nature, the welcoming atmosphere was felt even as she invited me to sit at her table along with another “favorite patron”, Chris. The theme was “Let’s blame it on the BOOGIE!”—Totally 1970’s, with a well decorated “meeting room” that was totally transformed into a disco dance room with a ball light device and vinyl records hanging from the ceiling and on the walls. Helium balloons added to the happiness along with the purple frosted three tier cake that was delicious.

The guest speakers reiterated her long list of accomplishments and her vision for the future of the new location which will be in a multi-story building on Second and Aztec Streets. Of course, the Gallup City Council has fully backed her in every way and Councilor Fran Palochek even played a song for her on her “Urban Guitar”.

The innovative beginnings Ms. Pellington has introduced are numerous and outstanding. These include a 2014 National Medal for Museum and Library Service, the highest honor conferred in the nation which was presented by former First Lady Michelle Obama on May 08, 2014. With over 123,000 public libraries in the United States, this is a recognition well-deserved.

Ms. Pellington was also recognized by the New Mexico State Senate for her outstanding accomplishments in the field of science and advocacy for library services and programs that benefit Gallup and the surrounding communities which includes the Navajo Nation. This partnership building will be carried on by the dedicated employees who will continue her labors of love as she has added to the work of Octavia Fellin who was the director from 1947 to 1990.

One extraordinary addition to Gallup’s public library is the Navajo language room located at the Children’s Library; the Rosetta Stone system that has been installed ensures our language is a part of her contribution to the “Indian Capital of the World” for anyone wanting to learn more of the Navajo involvement that helped establish Gallup.

The only stain on the event was the treatment of 18 Navajo individuals—all sober, well-meaning patrons who wanted to wish Ms. Pellington good tidings and farewell but were barred entry to the event by Barbra Stanley of Comcast Cable; she even tried to refuse my entry but I would have none of this as I have considered Ms. Pellington a personal friend since her arrival. These undesirable actions included forbidding my Mother admission.

Octavia Fellin was a friend of my family ever since I can remember so I know the Gallup public library will fare well as it is in capable hands of employees who will carry on both Fellin’s and Mary Ellen Pellington’s tireless contributions to Gallup and the world. My humble thanks to both women of valor and distinction.

Mervyn Tilden

Church Rock, N.M.