

KEVIN GRAFFAGNINO
Lifetime Achievement Award
5-14-2020

INTRO

The Award should be an occasion to celebrate with a room full of colleagues, friends, fellow historians, scholars, bibliophiles, CRV members and Student award winners and, especially Leslie, who has played a major role in your success.

The CRV must go on and keep its presence as a living and strengthening organization, so we meet virtually from our own homes. But when you and Leslie return to Vermont, many of us will look forward to a second celebration in person.

THE FIB THAT WORKED

After youthful years exploring the cultural amenities, reading voraciously (Kellogg-Hubbard Library in Montpelier), speed reading at 3600 wpm, penning many book reports, and dreams of athletic prowess until our recipient blew out a knee. He moved from Montpelier to Williston and attended CVU.

He had no funds to for UVM. He read at the Burlington's Fletcher Free learning about the gold in books, formed his own company, and advertised J.K. Graffagnino Books in the in a classified ad in the *Burlington Free Press*. The ad "lured" a customer. He asked his first client, a Morrisville pig farmer, what she collected, and she responded Vermont history, to which our Lifetime Achievement recipient responded, "what a coincidence, I want to specialize in Vermont history." In this case the trite phrase "the rest was history," as Kevin turned a fib into the truth.

J. K. Graffagnino Books put him through UVM. He had solid academic career at UVM majoring in History and English and wrote papers on Vermont topics some of which he later published. I met him as an undergraduate, supervised his MA thesis, and he worked with me as a graduate assistant. (At that time I once visited his apartment on Orchard Terrace and met his ancient cat "Woozer." Kevin and Leslie's love of cats and their affection for them has not abated.)

PUBLICATION

In late 1977 I assumed the role of editor of *Vermont History* and left UVM to become president of Colby-Sawyer College. Between 1978 and 1985 when I left the college for the State Historical Society of Wisconsin in Madison, I published 8 of Kevin's articles gradually relenting in my pictographic editing technic for him as he became a very capable writer.

Ken has a long bibliography the would alone qualify him for the Lifetime Achievement Award, with no other accomplishments, through their quantity, quality, and range. He published about Vermont history and especially historiography (Thompson and "The Vermont Story,"), literary figures (Sinclair Lewis, Walter Hard), the arts (Congdon and with Leslie "Thomas Waterman Wood," and Bruce Buxton's great collection), maps (*The Chambers Atlas of Lake Champlain*), bibliography, printing, prints, books, paper treasures, railroads, and with his Ph.D. dissertation on Ira Allen ("I find Ira more interesting than his older brother, Ethan.") articles in national journals.

When he went to Wisconsin in 1995 as Director of a huge library, he continued to publish on Vermont topics like steamboats and as an editor with John Duffy on the collected works of *Ethan Allen and His Kin*. Since he left Vermont in 1995 for Wisconsin, Kentucky, back to Vermont for five years before his "dream job at the William L. Clements Library, he has participated in writing or editing 16 or 17 books, and the one he told me he ranked high on the list, if not at the top, is *The Vermont Difference* (2014).

As he continued to published he exhibited many other talents. At Special Collections at UVM were he worked for 17 years, he began to get around Vermont speaking, (He will never forget his first presentation that I arranged for him at the Annual Meeting of the Vermont Historical Society VHS) making other presentations, and cultivating collectors who owned material that he wanted to add to the Wilbur Collection. He earned recognition—a young Trustee of VHS, on a CRV Committee, the board of the LCMM (Recognizing that he and Art Cohn had more than a career, they had a "calling"), the Committee for a New England Bibliography, and UVM and New England Phi Beta Kappa leadership. He also developed a talent for fund-raising first through book sales for Special Collections, then at the SHSW, the Kentucky Historical Society, a VHS which he kept it afloat by securing a \$1 million dollar gift from an individual, and at the Clements he once

was told a few thousand would be good and came back to Ann Arbor with \$6 million to be followed by a larger endowment. He is now poised, if UVM will bless it, to look for seven-figure support of the CRV. And he can run million dollar institutions. He had hoped to succeed Sam Hand when he retired as the Vermont expert in the UVM History Department. That did not work out (CTM), and I hired him to direct the SHSW library.

IN CONCLUSION

The 2020 recipient of the CRV Lifetime Achievement Award, J. Kevin Graffagnino, is not a one-dimensional man. He has run a business successful enough to put himself through VHM (closed because of conflict of interest selling Vermont books while he began to work with the Wilbur Vermontiana collection), he has a varied long, and formidable publications record, he can and has run major institutions, he can raise money with a midas touch, and at 65 and newly retired, he will not quit.

I am proud to call him my friend, now going on a half-century. In those decades we have gone separate ways, but our paths always have intersected . . . at UVM, with *Vermont History* edited in New Hampshire publishing his work, his coming to join me in Wisconsin, my returning to the VHS board during his directorship, and two books worked on together during his Michigan sojourn, and another now underway. In those decades the tide has turned, and I now look up to Kevin as I think he once looked up to me.

Kevin, may I be the first to congratulate you.

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