Empire Friends Programs at the 2011 NYLA Annual Conference

Friends Day at the 2011 NYLA Conference offered attendees a variety of programs with information and discussion specially tailored to Friends groups.

KIDS CAN ROCK YOUR LIBRARY!
The Junior Friends from the Weedsport Public Library kicked off the 8:00 a.m. program with a lively air guitar jam session. They wore their signature bright green tee shirts.

Leaders Anne Mlod and Holly Dutsche introduced the kids, who then talked about their activities of the past 10 years. These Junior Friends meet once a month and the kids choose the activities. The group includes kids from third to eighth grade. After that, other school activities such as sports make it more difficult to participate, although some members go on to become junior leaders.

Author visits are a popular activity. Bruce Coville was the first. Sometimes the group gets reduced rates when the kids do the inviting. The Junior Friends like to tie in with author visits to schools to make the visits more affordable. Typically, members have dinner with the author at the library.

Weekly Gazebo gatherings during the summer are sponsored by the adult Friends group. The Junior Friends have assumed responsibility for one of these community affairs each year. Jugglers and Happy Hat performances were big hits.

Junior Friends have participated in Library Legislative Day. When Governor Paterson visited Keuka College, one of the Junior Friends met with him and talked about how important libraries are. Legislators like to talk with the kids and spend a lot of time with them.

The Junior Friends participated in the Scholastic Books Pajama Drive. Information about this is available on the Scholastic website. After groups collect pajamas, Scholastic matches each pair with a book. At Christmas, Junior Friends collected Toys for Tots and took part in Polar Express for little kids. It was fun even if it was cold.

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Empire Friends Roundtable Achievements

In 2012, Empire Friends Roundtable will celebrate 20 years of service to the libraries and Friends groups of New York State. The following describes the highlights of the organization’s earliest years.

1992:
October 30: Empire Friends Roundtable (EFR) created at the NYLA Conference as a result of the 1991 White House Conference on Library and Information Services. Original EFR Board members included Randall Enos, Eleanor Galant, James Holley, Mel Johnson, Daniel Killian, Susan Keitel, Nancy McRay, Geoffrey Meek, Arlene Moran, Phyllis Pittman, Philip Robertson, Annette Von Dohen, Janet Welch, with A. Ross Kitt, Chairperson, Ad Hoc Committee.

November 23: Mailing of 340 letters and surveys to known New York State Friends groups to introduce them to EFR. Charlotte O’Dea was elected the first board President.

1993:

April: First newsletter (two pages) produced and distributed, with James Holley of Vestal Library as editor; summer and fall issues followed. It focused on EFR activities with feature articles about successful events held by Friends groups statewide.

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Another fund-raiser is a chicken barbecue. The kids are trained in asking for donations and how to react if they are refused. They help sort the children’s books for the Friends Book Sale during the February break. Parents assist with a Pancake Breakfast at Applebee’s while kids hold signs outside and help with serving. McDonald’s also supports this kind of fund-raising, but groups get less money. Outback restaurants are another possibility.

The group also celebrates National Gaming Day @ Your Library. They added a library sleepover in Weedsport featuring a Wii bowling tournament. Making pancakes for breakfast set off the fire alarm and brought out the fire trucks.

The Junior Friends like to take trips. Nine years ago, they began with a trip to New York City, where they visited Scholastic Books and the New York Public Library. In 2011, they made their eighth trip to Washington, DC, for the National Book Festival. The kids solicit donations for a huge raffle, which helps pay for the $350 per person cost of the trip. This is a very popular event for the whole community.

The Junior Friends present an award to kids who contribute a lot. The adults provide a scholarship, which has often been won by Junior Friends. Serving as officers provides an opportunity to learn responsibility and leadership. It’s clear the Weedsport Junior Friends have a great time and everyone benefits.

SUCCESSFUL PROGRAMMING AND FRIENDS GROUPS

The Clifton Park Half Moon Friends are another group that does a lot. Presenters for the program included JoAnne Robbins, Wilma Joziwiaik, and Kathy Adam.

Wilma talked about cooperation with the Master Gardener program to develop a xeriscape garden that complements the library. This project offered just one of many ways the Friends work with other community groups.

Advocacy is a major function. Friends make up a Get out the Vote Team. A series of sequenced mailings remind that a vote on the library budget is approaching and urge a “Yes” vote.

Mission-based activities are supported in the budget. In a $30,000 budget, $1,100 is allocated for advocacy. The process has been systematized so that roadside signs supporting a “Yes” vote go up on schedule each year.

Relations between the Friends, staff, and library board are excellent. The Friends group is an autonomous 501(c)(3) organization that controls its own finances, but it coordinates closely with the library. The President of the Friends meets regularly with the Library Director. The Assistant Director serves as liaison and is a member of the Friends board. Trustees occasionally attend meetings, and a joint meeting with the board is held each August. These good relations have been built since the Board requested that the Friends organize in 1995. The presenters agreed that it is probably easier to establish good relations when a new Friends group is formed than to improve relations with an existing group.

Constant Contact is a system used for electronic communication. $360 per month is budgeted for placement of a calendar in the newspaper. The Friends of the Library Newsletter is available in print and electronically.

The Friends provide many services. Cultural activities support and enhance what’s going on in the library. The Museum Pass Program makes passes to nine museums available for checkout. This service provides an opportunity to remind people what the Friends do. The Friends also coordinate Community Reads and Child Partner books.

Membership is available from $5 to $500. The used-book sale generates more than $20,000 during three 2-day sales throughout the year. Green Fiber recycles books and generates a small income. Books for Troops is another way to recycle paperbacks. The Friends sell tote bags and have a program to etch pavers outside the library to memorialize friends and loved ones.

The Friends also sponsor travel in cooperation with a local agency. The travel serves as an effective fund-raiser, but it also encourages community building and cooperation.

The success of the Clifton Park Half Moon Friends demonstrates how an active Friends group benefits not only a library but the entire community it serves. People work hard and have fun.

ALL ON THE SAME PAGE:
BOARD-FRIENDS-DIRECTOR RELATIONSHIPS

Judy Jerome, Director of the Dunham Public Library in Whitesboro introduced the third EFR program of the day by saying, “This is a cautionary tale.” The breakdown of the relationship of the Library Director and board with their Friends group led to action by the board that dissolved the group. Now the story is on its way to a happy ending with a new group forming on a firmer foundation.

The library’s Board of Trustees hires the Director, writes and approves policy, and presents a budget that assures financial viability. The Director manages the library, including hiring and firing of staff with board approval. Friends love and support the library. When relationships are misunderstood, disaster can follow.

In Whitesboro, the Friends were not organized as an autonomous body, but regarded themselves as independent. Some of their activities were questioned, and the Friends responded publicly, even going so far as to urge a “No” vote on the library budget. A series of news pieces on the local television station and articles in the newspaper brought unwanted negative publicity.

Last spring, a workshop involving the Library Director and representative Friends, staff members, and Trustees successfully clarified roles and responsibilities. The agreement reached serves as the basis for a new Friends organization. Everyone is hopeful that this new group will succeed in dispelling the bad experiences of the past.

CONCLUSION

While attendance at the three EFR programs was 31, 46, and 42, respectively, program evaluations revealed that few Friends groups attended the programs. The majority of attendees were library employees. As EFR plans its 20th anniversary celebration, the EFR Board seeks to build a network of regional meetings with Friends groups across the state. If your library system or county has regional meetings of Friends groups, please contact an EFR officer (see page 4 of this newsletter) to discuss representation or a program at your regional meeting.
Daniel Casey Award Presented to Friends of the Red Hook Library

The Empire Friends Round table recognized the Friends of the Red Hook Public Library with the Daniel W. Casey Award for Library Advocacy at the 2011 NYLA Conference. This small but active group has contributed enthusiasm, talent, and time to improve library services and benefit the community.

For the past 11 years, the Red Hook Friends have been working tirelessly to help their library grow from a small, sleepy rural library to a vibrant hub of the community. Since its beginning, this small but diligent group has raised more than $50,000 for the library, most recently making a $10,000 donation during the Grand Opening of the new Children’s Library in July 2011.

But the Friends have done much more than raise money. They’ve raised awareness and generated excitement about the library by sponsoring, planning, and hosting numerous programs over the years. Whether it’s a reading with a well-known author like Hillary Jordan, Da Chen, Barbara Bash, Karen Russell, or John Thorn, the annual Trivia Contest with standing-room-only attendance, an evening of Latin Dance with the band Soñando or a high-powered St. Patrick’s tribute with Irish band Hair of the Dog, they’re always busy creating opportunities for the community to come out, celebrate, and connect.

In 2010, the Friends raised the bar by obtaining a grant from the NEA for The Great Read. For two months, The Great Gatsby by F. Scott Fitzgerald was the talk of the town. The Friends hosted more than three dozen events during May and June, bringing more than 5,000 people through Red Hook to celebrate this community read.

They reached out to local businesses and institutions, including having a concert at Bard College’s Fischer Cen-

The Red Hook Friends donated $10,000 at the Grand Opening of the new Children’s Library in 2011.

ter, which drew nearly 800 people; brought the entire fifth-grade class of Red Hook Central School District to the Old Rhinebeck Aerodrome; held a speakeasy dance including a “raid” by the local police (who still have the “Gatsby bucks” payoff on display at the police station); and held a community day at Clermont, a local historic site, with nearly a dozen entertainers that drew hundreds of attendees. Frank Campagna, a retired engineer, assisted with the renovation that created a Children’s Library, built a life-size Thomas the Tank Engine to represent the library in the 2010 Hardscrabble Parade, and is busy with additional projects. Loretta Campagna, a Master Gardener, is developing a landscaping plan for the library, including a Children’s Learning Garden.

Betsy Syvetz, outgoing Empire Friends President, presented the 2011 Casey award on Friends Day at the November conference.

November 6: First EFR programs presented at the NYLA Conference, including “Library Friends Organizations and Operations” and “Library Friends Objectives and Offerings,” attracting 60 attendees each. Geoffrey Meek was elected Board President. The First EFR Lifetime Achievement Award was presented to Robert J. Trudell.

1994:

March 14: Planning initiated for an instructional video on starting or revitalizing Friends organizations.

July 13: Cost of NYLA Conference admission lowered for Friends attending EFR programs.

September 14: “How to Form or Revitalize a Library Support Group,” the EFR video, completed; a 20-minute production by the Rochester Institute of Technology and funded by contributions and NYLA.

Fall: Second EFR Lifetime Recognition Award presented to New York Assemblyman Michael Bragman; Nancy McRay elected EFR Board President.

1995:

July 13: Lifetime Achievement Award renamed to honor Daniel W. Casey and presented to him posthumously. Mr. Casey was known as Mr. Library for his advocacy for New York’s libraries beginning in the 1950s. The plaque presented to Daniel Casey Award winners is put on display at NYLA headquarters in Albany.

October 28: EFR Annual Meeting held at NYLA Conference in Rochester. Randall Enos was elected Board President; EFR programs included “The Biggest Little Booksale in the World,” “Focus on Friends Table Talks,” and “100 Ideas in 100 Minutes.”

Good Ideas from Friends All Over

ON THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING BABIES: The Irondequoit (NY) Library promotes the goal of early literacy with a regular program for babies up to 23 months. The program consists of music, body language, rhymes, stories in baby books, and interaction with other babies (parent or caregiver required).

DO FRIENDS GROUPS NEED LIABILITY INSURANCE? Perhaps. Friends groups often engage in offbeat activities where accidents might occur. Many states provide immunity from prosecution if actions arise out of voluntary services in a nonprofit. But state law can’t provide immunity from federal statutes, such as the Americans with Disabilities Act. It’s not a bad idea to talk with an attorney. How about your town attorney acting pro bono?

This newsletter is a publication of the Library Friends Roundtable of the New York Library Association.

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Call or write to us anytime. To visit the Empire Friends website, go to www.nyla.org, click on “Membership,” and select Empire Friends under “Roundtables.”

Association of Library Trustees, Advocates, Friends and Foundations (ALTAFF)
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EMPIRE FRIENDS MEMBERSHIP REGISTRATION

Name of Friends Group or Individual

Mailing Address

Contact Person ______________________________ Telephone ______________________________ Number of Members ______________________________

The annual membership fee of $35.00 for individuals or $55 for groups includes NYLA membership. If you are already a member of NYLA, please send your additional Friends membership check for $5.00, payable to “NYLA,” to New York Library Association, c/o Susan Anderson, 376 Cedarville Rd., Ilion, NY 13357. Contact: (315) 822-6746; sca1143@yahoo.com.

Please indicate “Empire Friends” on your check.

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