

Minutes from FLS Connections: Membership Recruitment, Engagement, and Retention Monday, September 13, 2021 from 4 to 5:15 p.m. via Zoom

The session had 19 participants which included 12 Friends of the Library groups from all across the state. This included six member of the Executive Board of the Friends of Libraries Section of the New York Library Association that arranged this virtual gathering.

Note: throughout the minutes, hotlinks have been attached so you can explore the activities of the various Friends groups and their libraries' webpages.

Lisa Wemett, FLS Past President and Coordinator for Professional Development, opened the session and welcomed the participants to **FLS Connections**, the third and last of three Zoom meetings scheduled for 2021. Lisa explained, in this series of virtual conversations, we want to talk about resilience and how Friends groups have adjusted to today's environment. These virtual gatherings are a new opportunity for Friends volunteers and staff to chat with members of the [FLS Executive Board](#) about topics important to our organizations.

Lisa started the discussion by telling the group about the FLS organization and the makeup of the FLS Board. Lisa shared how meetings to exchange ideas among Friends organizations started in 2015 in cooperation with local libraries around NY State. FLS is trying these virtual discussions since we could not meet in person in 2020 or 2021.

Lisa introduced today's sub-topics: Friends membership, highlighting recruitment, engagement, retention of membership, and recognition. She welcomed **Aletta Seales, Secretary of the Cambria Heights Library Friends** (a chapter of the [Friends of Queens Public Library](#)) who explained how some gardening programs have helped to "grow" their Friends.

Aletta Seales has served as Secretary for five years. She began her presentation explaining that the Cambria Heights Library Friends received a **Citizens Gardening Grant** that enabled the Friends to focus on recruitment, engagement, and outreach into the community on behalf of the Library and the Friends. Using the grant to sponsor "Grab and Go" materials for gardening projects, they also held the [Queens Botanical Garden](#) "Kitchen Gardening" program for children and families and those involved in community outreach. Each program provided an opportunity to recruit members for the Friends.

The Citizens Committee for New York City awarded a Neighborhood Grant in 2019 in the amount of \$2,400 to the Friends in the category of "Environment, Arts and Culture." The Friends group involved is still active including the Grant writer who is now a Group member. The group worked closely together including library staff to develop the plan and execute the process as the pandemic changed how the programs would be conducted, i.e., changing to virtual presentations of "Grow to Beautify, Grow to Pollinate, Grow to Eat and Glow with Health" which were conducted on a WebEx platform for security reasons.

Several slides illustrating the programs were shared.

Dec 31, 2020. Kwanzaa craft program with Grab and Go bags
Parents, adults, and children went to the library to register and pick up the bags to participate in the program. The bags included a wreath, poinsettia plant, cloth ribbon, glue, and glitter. The library staff prepared the bags and conducted the virtual program.

April 10, 2021. Queens Botanical Garden "Kitchen Gardening." The bags included beans, seeds, plastic zip-lock bag, moist towel. Idea was to watch them grow and then plant in soil. Was organized, planned, and presented as a virtual program.

April 30, 2021. Celebration of Poetry Month. It was planned as an open mike program with the community members reading their poems, but a step further allowed sharing the programs on the website -- a real success for a diverse community with participants sharing their poetry in their own language (including Spanish) and revealing stories from the Caribbean. It also drew in the largest number of participants.

May 8, 2021. M.O.M.'S Love, Vision Board. This group of parents formed a partnership with the library as they developed the program that allowed participants and their families to envision themselves, using websites or illustrations from magazines in collages to illustrate engagement in healthy activities, foods, etc. An added benefit was the event was advertised using [Eventbrite](#). Using this online registration platform drew in the largest group and also introduced the Friends to a new tool for program sign-ups. Since schools were closed there was a definite advantage over sending fliers to the schools.

May 22, 2021. Virtual paint program: The Vice President of the Friends who is also an artist developed the Grab and Go Bags of art supplies. Participants would need to create a picture of how they viewed themselves. The flyer was delivered to different groups and families. The presentation included directions on how to replicate their pictures. This program was limited to the first 25 people who registered and included parents with their children.

June 26, 2021. Queens Botanical Garden: "Math, Plants, Patterns." Participants were introduced to different patterns plants and leaves take in nature, such as spirals. Originally for children, mostly families attended, but there were not a lot of individual children. Answering the question, why so few attendees, the comment was "Children were zoomed out and school had just ended."

Angela Sinclair, President of the Cambria Heights Library Friends, was quoted in a report on the grant, that these projects attracting more interest for the Friends as well as for the library. There were eight virtual programs March 2020 – June 2021, including a variety of programs for all ages. These programs allowed participants to see the types of programs the library offered and recruited a few new Friends as well. "In a time of uncertainty, we provided stability."

Jerrie Grantham, Volunteer Services Manager of Queens Public Library, shared that there are 28 active Friends chapters throughout the system, but branches were closed during 2020. But because of this relationship, the Friends were instrumental providing materials and letting the community know that the library was there. **Director of Volunteer Services Scott McLeod** echoed Jerrie's comments.

Lisa thanked Aletta for giving a wonderful presentation and asked if there were any questions. There being none, she opened the discussion to members of the audience and stated questions could be asked by using microphone or by chat. Lisa then introduced this section with a slide that included the following questions to be addressed:

- What has your Friends group tried to attract member/supporters?
- How do you retain your long-time donors?
- What perks or incentives do you offer your members?
- How are volunteers recognized?

Kathy Rode, Recording Secretary, [Friends of Hampton Bay](#) (on the south fork of Long Island) explained that they have a tremendous group of 85 members. (President Emily Cullings was unable to attend.) As a summer community, they send out their fundraising appeal for members in the Friends' June and July publications and include membership renewal forms. The Secretary also sends renewals. They have many recurring members.

With the pandemic, they made up magnets for the back of cars to give away for members joining at the \$25 level. The magnets were oval approx. 5" x 4" (similar to those travelers find on vacation, like FLX for Finger Lakes), with an HB for Hampton Bay and "I'm a Friend of Hampton Bay Library." Kathy said it was gratifying to see how many magnets are attached to cars in town! Before the pandemic, their bookstore "Twice Sold Tales" had made between \$400-\$900 per week. They pivoted to selling bags of books for \$5 or \$10. After the pandemic restrictions were lifted, they provided a couple of sales on the lawn, primarily for kids, plus gardening and cookbooks.

A local photographer had taken pictures of local businesses (underwriting the cost) for a 2021 community calendar. For this year's edition for 2022, local sites were featured, sponsored again by businesses, and was much more successful as a fundraiser. The plan to start a members-only tea or cocktail party will have to wait until this COVID wave passes. In the meantime, they give away book bucks for every \$50 or \$100 donated. Read more about the Hampton Bay Friends in the December 2020 issue of "Friends News and Notes" newsletter (p. 6). All back issues of the FLS newsletter are available on the FLS website: www.nyla.org/friends > Publications. They also have an active Facebook page, the [Friends of the Hampton Bays Library](#).

Mickey Cherry, President of the [Friends of the East Rochester Public Library](#) (an eastern suburb of Rochester). Currently the dates for their bookstore, The Book Bin, have changed to 11a.m.-1p.m. three days a week with plans to increase to one more day. In Monroe County Library System there is a fee for holds (books requested coming from another library in the

system). The Friends awards free holds for members at the \$25 level for the full year of their membership. Each member is given a coupon to present at the circulation desk. When a request is made, there is no charge for the usual 50¢ per item fee. In late October, book sales will include providing a food truck outside (haven't decided which one yet) and the Children's Librarian will conduct a Story Time program. Membership renewal letters will go out in November beginning this year. This group also has a corporate membership level for \$25.

Rose Marie Joyce with the [Friends of the Community Library](#) in Cobleskill (Mohawk Valley Library System) explained that since the membership is small, they rely on donations only in lieu of levels of dues. Members get a reusable bag. Their current fundraiser consists of a raffle of baskets filled with items reflecting different themes and includes a book on the theme in each basket. Last year raised \$3,000 from 29 baskets. Also, since the pandemic, they conducted a book sale in the driveway. One of their issues is that it is hard to retain volunteers. Currently there are 10-12 active volunteers out of 47 total members.

Donna Keegan and Melia Gordon are the brand-new Co-Presidents of the [Friends of the Town of Ballston Community Library](#) (Southern Adirondack Library System). Donna has enjoyed being a member for a couple of years.

In the past, a big fundraiser has been a Spring Fling raffle of baskets of donated items, but not last year. Also, a mini golf fundraiser raises money from local businesses that sponsor the holes that are laid out throughout the whole library. (To read more about this fundraiser, see "FLS Conference Programs: Fundraising Without Book Sales" in the "Friends News and Notes" newsletter, December 2019, page 4. www.nyla.org/friends > Publications.) Holiday programs include tree lighting with crafting tables. There is a book sale at the end of September. Hampton Bay's idea of car magnets is "brilliant, spreading word in the community." And she was also impressed with the concept of food trucks as a great way to reach out.

Melia was so impressed with the big questions presented by Lisa as discussion points. Donna explained that the Friends group provides the opportunity for two meeting times - a meeting in the morning and the next month, in the evening. Because one of the co-presidents is a teacher, trading off the duties allows her to take a leadership role in the group. The variety of meeting times also provides members the opportunity to participate more regularly depending on their individual schedules. Lisa congratulated the two new Co-Presidents as examples of how Friends groups can function more effectively with some creative thinking.

[Editorial note: If you want to learn more about co-presidents as a model of leadership, watch the webinar with the Presidential Team of the Friends of Clifton Park – Halfmoon Public Library, "**Administrative Teams: A New Approach to Friends Leadership.**" March 19, 2019 – original broadcast date; available on NYLA's YouTube Channel. CPHL Friends devised a team of four individuals to divide up the presidential duties and dubbed them "The Quads." All webinar sessions are recorded and posted on the FLS webpage to watch any time, free of charge. Go to www.nyla.org/friends > Events > FLS Webinars.]

Marcia Elwitt, [Friends of the Brighton Memorial Library](#), which serves a suburb of Rochester, explained that the group has a loyal base of members. A newsletter is sent out twice a year and the membership form is included in the fall issue. Also, reminders are sent out in October and November if there is no response. Members of Friends of the Brighton Memorial Library receive early access to book sales, and they have a membership table at the sale. Members receive coupons for free books at sales. Coupons are for \$1 or \$2 depending on the level of donation. The base level of membership is \$10.

Members also receive program schedules in the mail. Memberships are advertised at programs such as their *Books Sandwiched In* series (“Brought to you by...”). The annual dinner has been skipped for the past two years. A Volunteer of the Year is awarded a desk clock with a plaque. (Marcia showed us the one she received a few years ago.) The cost of the annual dinner for Friends, volunteers, and staff is covered by the library and the Friends. The Friends have also underwritten magnets with the library’s hours and a “Join the Friends” message. Currently their tiny bookstore is not staffed, but customers can browse and pay on the honor system.

Lisa Wemett commented that membership forms throughout the library are great idea: the children’s room, the public literature rack, near the public computers, in the Friends book sale area—not just at the circulation desk. Having a form online is very important, even if just a PDF that people can print and send in.

Leslie Riley, Secretary of the [Friends of the Cornwall Public Library](#), said that during the pandemic, the Friends held several book sales outside in the fall and in the spring. The cost of a bag was increased to \$8 (from \$5) allowing \$10 donations in many instances; many of the shoppers did not want their change. And in the late spring, when the library opened its doors, so did the bookstore, but the hours have been changed as has the price of the materials: they were doubled except for children’s and large print.

Additional fundraisers in the past have included several published books on the history of Cornwall, postcards and note cards of local scenes. Other fundraisers include an Ice Cream Social (and book sale) (canceled for two years) and a Holiday Book Sale that features apple cider and doughnuts (possibly reinstated later this fall). In addition, the Friends hosts a two-day luncheon for Friends, Staff and Trustees; this schedule allows all the part-time workers to participate. The dues are \$15 for an individual and \$25 for a family; and keeping them low, has encouraged very generous donations. There are several newsletters published during the year that summarizes the Friends activities, the members, and the donations. Springtime is their membership renewal period.

Karen Ash, President of the [Friends of the Angelica Free Library](#), commented on their recognition events that includes a nice catered luncheon for Board members and Friends -- a special day. To attract members, the group “mines” the telephone book for addresses, then prepares a mailing that includes a membership form. Members have a choice to become a

Sustaining Member or Active Member. And if an Active Member, they can check boxes to volunteer for the baked good sale, present a program, staff the book sale, etc. Everyone receives a personal thank you note for their donation. There is also an annual appeal.

Before COVID, Friends did the physical labor for a book sale. A book sale preview night is not a big money maker, but they sold a \$10 ticket (which included a Friends membership) and served wine and cheese. (A temporary NYS liquor license is required.) The last time they held this promotion, eleven new members joined the Friends. They have retained 8 out of those 11 members. They ask shoppers to sign in at the book sale; if the person provides an e-mail address, they are put in a drawing for a prize. A local photographer created a puzzle from local points of interest that created a fundraiser. Members get a discount on the price of the puzzle. It was very successful and will try it next year.

Julie Stacey, Acting President, Friends of the [Memorial Library of Little Valley](#) (Chautauqua-Cattaraugus Library System) then remarked that there is not a lot of income, so we continue with bake and book sales. They also organized a rummage sale. It was limited to inside the building and raised \$800. Outside there was a hot dog stand that was very popular (a local business). The health department can only permit selling food if the preparation is at the library for hot dogs, soup, etc. – no home kitchens can be involved. So we can't do these sales any more as there is no kitchen in the library.

A Treasures and Trash sale that included crafters or flea market booths held in the old school gym was the site of a Friends book sale, bake sale, and "Sloppy Joes." The vendors pay a booth fee to the Friends. The Friends also promotes little book sales at other events. Friends volunteers serve as parking lot attendants for sportsmen shows and receive \$200 for the weekend. Currently there is no membership charge to join the Friends; by participating, you are a member by buying into the whole idea. We do maintain a list of sustaining members or are on the list for a bake sale. This is a small town with no income. Many people use the library's free Wi-Fi in the parking lot. A question of how many members do you have that carry out all these activities? The answer is our core and active members number about 4-5 people.

Anne Andrianos, [Friends of the Onondaga Free Library](#), mentioned that their Friends developed a new book bag and are now able to charge a higher price, but a bag is free as a part of the membership. They did revive an old fundraiser, a community cookbook that included the sharing of family/favorite recipes and a story. Two hundred recipes were published, and the book has sold out. It generated a lot of good feelings on the Friends Board and kept them enthusiastic during the pandemic.

At the conclusion of the discussions, Lisa brought the meet-up to an end with the following announcements:

The Friends of Libraries Section was formed in 2014, after existing as the Empire Friends Roundtable from 1992 until 2014 and we hope to have some celebrations next year as we turn 30!

One valuable membership benefit is that FLS members may attend FLS-sponsored webinars at no additional cost. ***Before Friends Become Frienemies*** will be held on Thursday, September 30 – 2 to 3:30 p.m. Watch this session in NYLA's webinar archive after October 1. Topics include conflict management, putting some strategies in place to help avoid conflict in the first place, including how to write an operating agreement (also known as a Memorandum of Understanding), and the importance of written guidelines for Friends expenditures.

The New York Library Association's [Annual Conference](#) will provide a virtual as well as a two-day in person program this year. The Virtual Conference will take place on Thursday, October 28 and Friday, October 29. There will be live broadcast events and a selection of on-demand programs you watch at any time.

ABCs of Best Practices for Friends Groups One of the sessions sponsored by FLS is on Friday, October 29 starting at 11:30 a.m. Tune in for the live broadcast of this workshop which will feature ideas from a wide variety of Friends groups that will help your Friends group become even more successful

Fundraising Without Book Sales

Register for the conference and you'll have access to this on-demand session with creative, out-of-the-box ideas on fundraising from three different Friends groups from around the state.

We are so excited about heading to Syracuse, gathering **in person** in the Nicholas J. Pirro Convention Center in The Oncenter Complex in downtown Syracuse. Dates are November 3-6, with pre-conference seminars taking place on Wednesday the 3rd. The conference theme is "We're All In." We hope all our Friends groups in Central New York will come to the conference – the first time it has been right in their own backyard in almost 25 years! If you register for the in-person conference, you have access to all the virtual conference offerings the week before.

Financial FAQs for Nonprofits (continued education seminar)

Wednesday, November 3

1:30 – 4:30 p.m.

John C. Parcell IV, CPA, CFE, and Nathan B. Wray, EA

You can register separately for the FLS continuing education seminar, **Financial FAQs for Nonprofits**. This 3-hour professional development session is perfect for Friends officers, treasurers, staff members, and library trustees. FLS members pay a reduced fee. ***This pre-conference session is only available in person, in Syracuse.***

Our speakers are John C. Parcell IV and Nathan Wray. John is a Certified Public Accountant and Certified Fraud Examiner from Canton, NY. He provides a wide range of accounting

services, assisting nonprofits, as well as commercial businesses and healthcare organizations. Nathan Wray is also an accountant that works with nonprofits. As an enrolled agent, Nathan is a federally licensed tax practitioner with the right to represent taxpayers when dealing with the IRS. (He can represent taxpayers, trusts, estates, and corporations when dealing with issues, such as tax appeals, collections, and audits.) Bring your financial questions to learn from John and Nathan – it will be an excellent investment of your time.

Friendly Relationships: Working Together for the Library

Friday, November 5, 2:15 p.m. The library director and the President of the Board of Trustees of the Hamilton Public Library will talk about the importance of strong connections between the library administration, the library board, and the Friends to support their library. This session will be live, in Syracuse. We hope to see you there!

And finally, please join us for the **FLS Annual Membership Meeting, November 18**. FLS President Karen Sperrazza and Incoming FLS President Kerstin Cruger invite everyone to attend the FLS Annual Membership Meeting via Zoom on **Thursday afternoon, November 18, beginning at 2 o'clock**. Come see how they use the miracles of technology to pass the gavel virtually! Meet the members of the FLS Board and our award recipients. We'll share the highlights of 2021 in our annual report to the membership. Following the business portion of the meeting, **Karen Ash, Chair of the Friends of Angelica Free Library, will share how they use Facebook** to engage both their members and residents of all ages. Registration for this meeting will open on October 11. Watch for our reminders to sign up so you'll receive the Zoom link.

Many thanks to our scribe, Leslie Riley, for providing these minutes of this highly productive discussion! Watch for more FLS Connections in 2022.