When Friends get Together

The most recent Massachusetts Friends of Libraries program, “Friends Sharing with Friends”, was held on Saturday, October 21, 2017, at the Chicopee Public Library with an attendance of fifty-four Friends from groups across the state. The Chicopee Friends group started the day off with a great spread of coffee, juice and pastries.

The theme of the program was the services provided through the state for libraries. Jan Resnick, Commissioner from the Massachusetts Board of Library Commissioners (MBLC), opened the program with an overview of the MBLC’s history and the work of the Commissioners. Established in 1890, this first in the nation state agency has the responsibility to organize, develop, coordinate and set policy for library services throughout the Commonwealth. It works to ensure equal access to library information resources for every resident in Massachusetts. Duties of the nine Commissioners, (appointed to 5 year terms by the Governor) include: setting direction for the agency; setting funding priorities; advocating for state funding; administering State Aid and Library Construction programs; approving Massachusetts Library System and the Center for the Book budgets and overseeing the networks and programs for the blind funding.

Jan emphasized the importance of advocacy by everyone within the library community. She pointed out that if every Friend and Trustee were to contact their state legislator, we would have an avalanche of support. She recommended we go to Masslib.org and look at the Advocacy Tool Kit. Jan suggested contacting your legislators now, attending local Legislative Breakfasts, and the Massachusetts Library Association’s Legislative Day.

The meeting was a chance for the attendees to meet James Lonergan, newly appointed Director of the MBLC. James gave a more detailed overview of the many programs administered by the Board. The budget includes $9 million in State Aid that goes directly to public libraries which meet the qualifications for the library certification program, such as minimum hours open, minimum expenditures for library materials and standards for library directors. Other programs funded include the Massachusetts Library System, which provides delivery services and ongoing training and the Library of the Commonwealth at the Boston Public Library which makes some electronic resources available for the entire state and which digitizes local collections from all libraries in the state.
A major part of the work of the MBLC is the Library Building Construction Program which since 1987 has provided $350 million in planning and construction grants.

The final speaker was Greg Pronevitz, Executive Director of the Massachusetts Library System who began by also stressing the vital need for advocacy from the library community. He urged attendance at Library Legislative Day at the State House on March 16, 2018 and emphasized the vital importance of legislators hearing from library supporters.

Greg then went on to describe the programs of MLS, which are funded by the MBLC, emphasizing that it is the cooperative efforts of all parts of the library community that makes our programs successful. Delivery services provided by MLS are the backbone of our resource sharing system. Seven million items are delivered annually. That means 60,000 items per day, are delivered to libraries by 35 drivers employed by MLS. Delivery covers the entire state, and even goes to Rhode Island. Consideration is being given to expand services to all of New England and New York.

**Ashland Library Friends Win Fantastic Friends Award for Courageous Conversations**

Alice Welch presented The Donna Forand Fantastic Friends Award 2017 to Betsy Emberly, Ashland Friends. As part of the award, the Friends received $300 and the Library $200. The Award recognizes Ashland’s Courageous Conversations program that was initiated after hateful graffiti was found at local schools. The Friends invited community groups to participate in discussions about the graffiti and other sensitive community issues. Over 90 residents attended. The success of this program inspired follow up meetings in the community.

Courageous Conversations was initiated as a response to separate instances of hateful graffiti at the local schools. The Friends invited other community groups to participate in the event which was held in the high school cafeteria and was attended by over 90 people. It was so successful that it inspired follow up programs.

Three other libraries were recognized for their program. The Friends of the Robbins Library in Arlington provided a picture book and tote bag to each kindergartener with their first library card. The Friends of the Forbes Library in Amherst were recognized for a wine tasting event and the Friends of the Sandwich Public Library for creating and publishing a calendar for 2018 that each month has a photograph of a town resident reading a book while engaged in another activity.

**Annual Meeting of the MFOL**

The annual meeting of the MFOL was held at the Friends Sharing with Friends meeting on October 21.

The following slate of officers was nominated and unanimously accepted. President - Alice Welch; Vice President - Mary Barry; Secretary - Terry Dorsey; Treasurer - Keith Schwegel.

MFOL has 213 members including 176 group members. The goal of increasing membership by 10% was reached.

**Goodbye to a valued employee and friend**

Erin Williams Hart who was our special support person at the MBLC has left us and Boston to return to her home in Madison, WI. She will be much missed by all of us who depended on her knowledge and willingness to help. Good luck, Erin.
FRIENDS SHARING WITH FRIENDS IS EXACTLY THAT

and here are some of the great ideas that were shared at the last meeting

Chicopee: Held a golf tournament which includes a raffle, lunch, dinner, Teddy Bear pool, local sponsors, and a chip and put tournament. Held a spring and Christmas basket raffle. Sponsored concerts for about eight years. Partnership with Knights of Columbus results in proceeds of one of their monthly suppers going to the Library.

Malden: Held a wine tasting, charged $35 per person, and included a raffle.

Norfolk: Held a book sale and used a website to get volunteers to help. Netted over $18,000 on the sale. Held a program for children to read to a dog. Another program encouraged people to use recipes from cookbooks in the library’s collection and exchange the results.

Irving: Held a potluck dinner and had someone do a presentation (not a fund raising event). Participated in the town-wide tag sale. Held a Beatles tribute band event.

Williamsburg: Held a basket raffle. Sponsored a pie delivery service. Sponsored intergenerational conversations. Held a “drop everything and read” day. Held a Farm and Garden tour.

Weymouth: Sold a calendar that is a page a day book calendar – bought it for $3.50 from United for Libraries and sold it for $10.00.

Southwick: Held a craft fair and sold craft supplies as well as providing space for craft people. Held a basket sale. A Friends member acts as a volunteer recruiter and coordinator.

Agawam: Held a juried art show and a juried photography show. Held a basket raffle and a book sale. Supported the library’s summer reading program by giving prizes.

Holyoke: Heard about mini-golf at a previous MFOL meeting and are now doing it for the third time. Held a cocktail party the night before the golf. Have a program to build up the part of the library’s collection to highlight Latino and Puerto Rican culture and history.

Sunderland: Held a plant sale and had a book fund drive. Next year will help celebrate Sunderland’s 300th anniversary.

Fitchburg: Hold a monthly book sale. Had mini-golf one year and have an on-going “Nancy” project in which library supporters make knitted items to sell and give proceeds to the library.

Ashland: Solicited book donations to use as summer reading prizes. Gave books to the food pantry. Gave tee shirts to town leaders and school leaders and asked them to contribute to the library. Added adults to the summer reading program.

Leominster: Held a poinsettia sale.

Grafton: Have an ongoing book sale.

Lawrence: An annual appeal is the main fund raiser.
Becket: The town needed an after school program so the library provides that through grants. Friends send two letters a year with appeal for funds. Participate in the Hill Town Brouhaha. Do workshops on winter evenings.

Deerfield: Just finished participating in town’s centennial celebration.

West Springfield: Resuming book sales.

Amherst: Work with local restaurants to offer percentage of one evening’s proceeds to the library.

Orleans: Are going to fix shelves in the Friends room to better hold books for book sale. Just getting started on work for a new library. Sponsor a lifelong learning program that has 1200 people signed up this semester.

Westminster: Hold book sales, including at the farmer’s market in the summer; just gave the library $1,000.00.

Ashby: Holds a Pumpkin Festival that has over 40 crafters and vendors and includes a tractor parade.

Longmeadow: Holds a book sale. A member of the Friends developed a logo for the library.

Shrewsbury: Held a “Treasures in the Trunk” event – people buy a spot to park their car and sell things from the trunk of the car.

Hull: Friends want to get something for the hearing and seeing impaired and start a service for the homebound. They planted 150 daffodils on library grounds.

Yarmouth: Sent books to Jamaica, donated books to homeless in Boston and held a poinsettia

New Friend Group Members

Friends of (FO) Thayer Public Library, Braintree Citywide
FO Boston Public Library, Boston
FO Eastham Public Library, Inc., Eastham
FO Cambridge Public Library, Cambridge
FO the Levi Heywood Memorial Library, Gardner
FO the Berkshire Anthenaeum, Pittsfield
FO Topsfield Library, Topsfield

Many thanks to Alice Welch, Carol Gafford, Katherine Dibble and Mary Barry for providing the content for this newsletter
Recruiting your “Friends”

By Carol Gafford, Swansea Library

Anyone involved in volunteer driven organizations knows the challenges that come with recruiting new members. Many Friends of the Library groups struggle with recruiting. I would like to share a few lessons learned from my own experience. Having a cohesive team of people with a shared vision can create a happy and successful organization. How does that happen? It takes an understanding of the cycle and psychology of groups, energetic and positive leadership and good timing.

Friend’s organizations usually exist to assist the library with fundraising, programming and generally helping the library in purchasing needed equipment. Having a president that is dedicated to the library is key. Now, you might be thinking that, of course, everyone knows that. It’s a given. But, really, it is not. Sometimes there is a president who has been in the position for a long time and needs a rest before burnout sets in. Or maybe they were elected president because the organization needed one to continue and they agreed to do it. Having a leader who is there because they want to be and is up to the challenge of motivating a group of people is important.

People are generally attracted to happy and uplifting people. Being part of a book sale or plant sale that is successful and fun is more likely to attract new members. Another method of recruitment is having members convince friends to join. This is nothing new but I have found that people like to be part of groups where they know members who are enjoying what they do. Members are happy when they are appreciated. Members matter.

A friend’s group can work magic for a couple of years with multiple events and successful fundraising. In time people get tired or they have work and family changes. The momentum shifts and when that happens, adjust your expectations. Keep members by asking them to work on particular projects and by not overwhelming them.

And this is important: talk to people. Ask them to help. Appreciate their suggestions. Invite them to become members. Don’t depend on a flyer or press release. People like the personal touch and they are more likely to help if they are asked. One last thing: Don’t ever give up. Don’t stop asking. Don’t stop talking about the amazing accomplishments of your friend’s organization. As long as the core group of members meets regularly, things will get done. Remember, as Margaret Mead once said and most non-profit groups live by, “Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has.”
President’s Reflections on 2017

As I reflect on the past eight years of my tenure as the MFOL president I am always awed at the Friends sharing sessions and the applications we receive for the Fantastic Friends Award. I am awed by not only the sustained commitment our Friends community has to supporting local libraries, but the diversity and endlessly creative, imaginative activities and programs undertaken.

I am also proud to see the sustained success of the MFOL over past years. I believe the reason for our success is simple—we have remained true to our mission. Our mission—to encourage and support new and existing Friends Groups, facilitate the exchange of useful information among Friends Groups, and strongly advocate for excellent library services in Massachusetts.

Here are some of the highlights from 2017:

- Provided consultant services to Friends Groups.
- Offered complementary, one time annual membership to 17 of the smallest Friends Groups.
- Awarded the Fantastic Friends Award to Ashland Library for their inspiring and brave “Courageous Conversations” Program.
- Fifty members attended the Spring Friends Sharing with Friends Educational Program hosted by Christa McAuliffe Branch Library, Framingham. The educational program emphasized grass roots advocacy methods for Friends, and an informational sharing session. Fifty-four members attended the Fall Sharing with Friends Program hosted by Chicopee Library. The educational program included Massachusetts Board of Library Commissioners and Massachusetts Library System—what resources and services do they provide to you and your library, and an informational sharing session.
- Over the summer, a 10 question survey (via Survey Monkey) was sent to MFOL members. Fifty-five responses were received and summarized for the following topics: websites/social media, membership trends, membership software, joining/paying dues on line, benefits/ incentives to join, and member dues structure.
- Attendees at the spring Friends Sharing with Friends completed handwritten cards to be sent to their State Senators and Representatives in support of libraries and additional funding. This effort resulted in over 50 personal appeals.
- During 2017, the Board also placed emphasis on growing our membership. This was primarily in hope of increasing our ability to represent a larger base in advocacy efforts and include some smaller Friends Groups in our membership. The Board's goal of increasing membership by 10% was surpassed in August as we added our 14th new member. In addition, our newly revised Lifetime membership level was chosen by 5 members.

In closing, thank you for your membership, for being a part of MFOL’s success, and the support you provide to your Library through your Friends group activities.

Alice Welch
President
Massachusetts Friends of Libraries (MFOL)--Membership Survey Results

MFOL conducted a 10 Question Survey of members and past members in July-August, 2017. Highlights of the 55 responses received follow. Additional detail is available on request by emailing: massfriendsoflibraries@gmail.com.

BACKGROUND. 37 Friends groups or about 70% of respondents have memberships of 300 and below. Respondents included Friends Groups with as few as 4 members to as many as 1,000 members. 32 Friends groups or about 60% of respondents are located in towns with populations of 20,000 or less, and 40% are over 20,000.

WEBSITE/SOCIAL MEDIA PRESENCE. 52% of Friends Groups have a webpage that is part of the Library's website. 36% have a separate Friends website. 12% do not have a web presence. In addition, 45% of Friends Groups have a FaceBook page. 17% of respondents mentioned also having: Twitter; a page on blogspot.com; Constant Contact for email blasts.

MEMBERSHIP TRENDS. Over the past few years, membership has increased for 16 or 31% and stayed the same for 24 or 46% of Friends Groups. 11 or 21% of Friends Groups experienced a decrease in members.

The Friends Groups experiencing increased membership attributed their success to the following:

1) Advertising membership at all library and community functions;
2) On-line payment - PayPal to their website
3) Ads in newspapers;
4) Special Mailings; and
5) Membership drives.

For the four Friends Groups increasing membership by special mailings activities include: a town-wide mailing; mailing after library renovations were completed; targeting follow-up letters to past Friends members; and targeting mailings to new homeowners.

Fifth, membership drives included: week long drive with table near main desk at library just asking folks to join (gift card raffle for new members and coupon for 5 free books at book sale) and additional 1-day drives; October designated membership month with new members signing up from Sept 1-Oct 31 entered into drawing for framed photo donated by artist.

MEMBERSHIP SOFTWARE:

Nine different types of software are used by the Friends Groups that responded. Excel was the most popular. Next in popularity was Wild Apricot and Constant Contact. File Maker, Word Press, Google Docs, Mailchimp, Access, Front Stream/Gift Works and Mac Pages were also cited. Most respondents had a positive response to ease of use. Access had a negative response. One respondent would not recommend using Google Docs and another would not recommend Constant Contact, citing it good for email but not for a membership database.

For more detail and information on other questions asked, visit our website: https://massfol.org
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