



AT THE LIBRARY

By Julie Winkelstein
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“While libraries have changed dramatically over the past 100 years, Friends groups – the citizens who support libraries with their time and money – continue to play the same crucial role they did during the days of Andrew Carnegie: ensuring the viability and sustainability of our systems by raising money, awareness, and political support.”

-Sally Gardner Reed, 2004,
American Libraries, v35

A Friends group can be an integral part of the fundraising efforts for many libraries – including public, university and special libraries. In the San Francisco Bay Area, there are Friends groups attached to most of the public libraries. According to their website, The Contra Costa Library system has a Friends group in every community. The Oakland Public Library has lots of information available on their attractive and easy to use website, including how their funds are used each year. In the Alameda County library system, most of the branches have an active Friends group and they help provide funding for materials and programs. Richmond and Berkeley also have Friends groups. In 1999, the San Francisco Public Library combined their Foundation and their Friends group into a productive and enthusiastic organization now called the Friends of the San Francisco Public Library.

But no matter the size or

the range of activities of these Friends groups, what they have in common is volunteers who are committed to supporting their libraries – financially, politically and, well, emotionally. And one way to see the impact of what Friends groups all over the United States are doing is by exploring the website of FOLUSA – Friends of Libraries U.S.A. – at www.folusa.org.

FOLUSA was officially established in 1979 at the annual conference of ALA, the American Library Association. The original impetus behind its creation was the need for Friends groups to be able to share fundraising ideas with each other. They have proved successful at this, and, in addition, have become a united and much needed voice of advocacy for libraries. There is a vast array of subjects on their website, including awards, book sale ideas, fact sheets and publications. One award winner is the Friends of the Solana Beach Branch of the San Diego County

Library, who won the 2005 large library FOLUSA/Baker & Taylor award for creating a 6 weeks long Noches de Familia program to bring more members of their large Latino community into the library. The program included workshops and seminars on citizenship, immigration, parenting and health issues.

Two examples of their book sale ideas include a search-a-book service from the Friends of the Grace A. Dow Memorial Library in Midland, Michigan – for a \$2 fee they will search for a particular book for one year. And in Youngstown, New York, the Friends of the Youngstown Free Library included a “Book Buck” in their newsletter, which entitled the bearer to \$1 worth of books at the next book sale.

The many fact sheets cover a range of practical topics, such as fundraising, literacy programs, advocacy, strategic

planning, how to start or revitalize a Friends group, and special friends – like teen Friends or Friends groups for academic libraries.

Some of the best ideas from FOLUSA have been put into a book called *101+ Great Ideas for Libraries and Friends (Marketing, Fundraising, Friends, Development and More!)*. This book, along with a grant writing book and a Friends advocacy book, are new books available on the FOLUSA website.

What is so exciting to me about this organization is that it is made up of people who – like the Friends group at my library – are passionate about keeping their libraries open and relevant. The creativity they bring to this basic belief is inspiring and reassuring.