



AT THE LIBRARY

By Julie Winkelstein
May 30, 2008

“Over \$30,000 worth of purchases were made with Love Your Library vouchers in the first-ever Connecticut state-wide library fundraiser with Barnes & Noble... Librarians, book sellers, authors, publishers, and patrons pulled together, bringing not only funds, but much-needed publicity to Connecticut's libraries, library organizations, and the iCONN program.”

-Connecticut State Library
newsletter

It would be natural to consider a bookstore a threat to public libraries. Even with our most obvious difference – bookstores sell, libraries lend – we are frequently serving the same group of people, those who are interested in books, CDs and other materials. But there are many who believe, as I do, that rather than being competitors, we should be allies. Together, we support the idea that books and literacy are important; so important, in fact, that we dedicate our staff, our money and our time to making sure our materials make it into the hands of our users.

So, it makes sense that Barnes & Noble would be involved in what they call Bookfairs – fundraisers that help raise money for local non-profit focusing on literacy, the arts or education. On set dates, shoppers use easily obtained coupons to make purchases, and a percentage of the sales goes to the non-profit in the form of a gift card or a check. And, if the non-profit has a

store account, the gift card purchases are discounted, also.

“We love to do this,” Barnes & Noble Community Relations Manager Sandy Graves told me when I visited the El Cerrito Plaza store to find out more about their program. “I’d love to do one every day of the week,” she added. I appreciated her enthusiasm for her job, including her stint as the costume character of the day, Curious George. I missed seeing her dressed up but I was fascinated to find out there is a battery-operated fan housed in the head of most of these large and hot costumes. Unfortunately, Curious George isn’t one of those and so she only lasts about twenty minutes at a time. When she has reached her capacity for being uncomfortably warm, she signals the storyteller, who then tells the children it’s time for George to go.

Why a signal? I asked her. Because, she explained, there are many rules about using these copyrighted characters, including no talking and no

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removing parts of the costume in public.

When I did a Google search to find more libraries who use Barnes & Noble for fundraising, I found many examples. A statewide program in Massachusetts brought together state library associations, local public libraries and Barnes & Noble.

As they say in their press release, "Through organizations and individuals, libraries continue to discover alternative ways of finding high quality library program and services statewide." Special programs at these stores included visits from state officials, author visits and book discussions.

A Connecticut statewide library fundraiser included store author visits, featured readings by children's librarians at selected stores, and the distribution of library-related bookmarks at

all of the stores. I particularly appreciate this kind of collaboration in which each agency supports the work of the others.

I wanted to find out more about this program because on May 31, a percentage of all sales

made with the appropriate voucher will go to the Albany Library. There will be free balloons and two storytimes that

day, one at 11 a.m. and one at 3 p.m.. Clifford, the Big Red Dog - a popular and well-known children's book character - will even make an appearance.

It could be sad that public libraries have to find these alternative ways to bring in funds. But in the long run these kinds of collaborations help everyone - the businesses, the libraries and ultimately, the communities themselves.

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