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We Love LIBRARIES!

Volunteering with Friends groups is rewarding experience

by John J. Roberts

My life has been enriched and influenced by libraries, librarians, library staffs and, of course, books.

Our home was full of books, many that we owned and always a number from our local library, checked out by any of the five of us. We even had books from "Book Haven," a business that rented popular mysteries. Our local library was only a block from my grade school and four blocks from junior high. I regularly stopped after school to pick up books to read overnight. The librarian often suggested books based on her knowledge of my reading skills and needs. These I returned the next day on the way to school. Our high school library supplied reference books, but I still relied on the local library for much of my reading, particularly for weekends and summers.

I often visited the main library at Purdue University with my father when he placed books on reserve for students in his classes. I learned to use the card catalog, then a wonderful feature but now only a fading memory. When I started college, my knowledge of the Purdue library was definitely an advantage.

As I concentrated on a biology/agriculture career, I discovered that departmental libraries offered

detailed collections suited to my specialties. When I transferred to Griffin, Ga., in 1984, I found two libraries available, one public and the other at the Experiment Station, both with expert staffs. These I also used and benefited from much as I had throughout my education and professional career.

After retirement, we moved to the beautiful North Georgia mountains. Towns County, one of the smallest in Georgia, had three wonderful libraries. We quickly learned that the two public libraries and the Young Harris College library provided marvelous facilities and staffs. We also learned that funding for our public libraries was being steadily reduced at state and local levels. This made no sense since we realized the importance of our public libraries in serving communities in a multitude of ways. We joined The Friends of The Libraries of Towns County, hoping to help by volunteering to work on fundraising projects and perhaps repay in some measure for the years of support provided by the many libraries that have touched our lives.

Our 10 years with our Friends group have been one of the most rewarding of any of the volunteer experiences of our lives. We progressed from toting and sorting books to serving as Book and Bake Sale chairs to each

serving a three-year term as president to nearly permanent membership and sale chairs. We still tote and sort books and will continue to do so as long as we can.

When we started, we had one sales event per year, two days in August. We added an April sale to highlight National Library Week and a second weekend to our summer sale. We have a special members-only evening preview sale to treat our members to first choice and encourage new members. We sponsor an adopt-an-author program and a book sale cart offering the best of our donated books year-round.

Community response to our Friends' efforts has been super. Book donations keep arriving at both libraries regularly. These plus dues from our 160+ members, volunteer hours, donated baked goods plus other community support have enabled FOLTC to provide up to 80 percent of the new books and many added upgrades to technological advances and physical needs. ►►

John Roberts is a Georgia master naturalist who is camp host at Trackrock Campground near Blairsville. He is also a retired research plant pathologist, having spent more than 40 years as a scientist in wheat breeding and pathology.