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We Love LIBRARIES!

The roles of library trustees, directors and Friends

by Charlotte Gellert

When there is involvement, guidance and appreciation shown by the library director and library board, Friends of the Library (Friends) groups are true support partners and everyone is always on the same page. The roles may seem separate, but cooperation between them is integral to a well functioning library.

It seems that what was written in the very first Georgia Public Library Handbook in 1984 regarding the roles and relationships of trustees, directors and Friends is still true today. "Trustees represent citizen control and governance of the library as specified by state law. The library director represents the administration and management of the library. Friends of the Library represent citizen participation and assistance in the library."

I was in my second year as a trustee in 1985 when Barbara Loar, then director of the DeKalb Rockdale Newton regional library system, urged our library board to facilitate the formation of a Friends group. She was forward-looking enough to know we would need Friends if we wanted to secure local and state support for a new library building. A steering committee was formed, by-laws were drafted and the organizational meeting and social, featuring author Olive Anne Burns, was held on November 12, 1985. The Friends held small book sales outside the library (no room inside), and stored books in their garages and basements in between sales. Our first librarian, hired in 1986, recognized the importance of the Friends group, and began guiding them in the right directions.

The library board was moving forward on applying for a state matching grant to build a new library, and when we went to the board of commissioners chairman to ask for a

SPLOST tax for the local match, he said "Show us the grassroots support first, then come back and see us." The Friends jumped right in, increasing volunteers, getting names on petitions, writing letters to the newspapers, running phone banks, and mailing fact sheets and reminders of the special election date. The result was a two-to-one vote for passage of the SPLOST on June 9, 1987.

The proceeds from their book sales paid for refreshments and other items for the grand opening in 1990. The new building included a permanent space for the Friends to house the used and donated books and have a monthly sale to the public.

The library director attends the monthly board meetings and prepares annual wish lists, usually between \$5,000 - \$10,000, in the categories of advocacy and advertising; library programs; training and development for staff; nourishment and beautification; and capital items. These wish lists serve as guidelines for the use of Friends funds to support the needs of the library. A library trustee serves as liaison and attends the monthly meetings also.

The library director speaks at their annual meeting to recap the ways the Friends have supported the library in the previous year. Friends' board members are invited to staff and supporters appreciation events. They have received plaques of appreciation from the library board. The director reports on Friends activities and proposed wish lists at library board meetings. ►►

Charlotte Gellert is a 28-year veteran trustee, Friend and library advocate.