

## **Friends of the Library Conference Report**

*Friends....the more we get together, the happier we'll be.....*

Conference report submitted by Joy Huebert

Volunteerism is alive and well in public libraries. On May 11 and 12, a first-ever conference was held for Friends of 18 libraries in the West Kootenay region of British Columbia. The conference was conceived as a potential way to develop stronger groups by sharing information, providing training, and generating enthusiasm. In the area, Friends groups have provided considerable benefits for their affiliated libraries, and anything that can be done to strengthen further initiatives should be done!

The conference started with a Friday night dinner and keynote address by Delyse Sylvester, Director of the Selkirk College Foundation. She spoke passionately about the important role organizations such as Friends, that exist mainly to raise money, play in community development. By fostering volunteer participation in socially worthwhile endeavours, they create community and improve people's lives.

Both the giver and the receiver benefit from the fund raising process. The receiver benefits from better services, but the giver has the opportunity to make a profound difference in the lives of other people. It is our responsibility to create effective channels to allow the flow of giving and receiving to take place.

Delyse emphasized the need to make the fund raising process a personal experience for the giver. In Canada more money is given by individuals to a cause he or she passionately supports, than by any other source. Friends of Libraries should not hesitate to identify their supporters, and approach them to contribute financially to their libraries. It takes courage to ask people for money face-to-face, but it is the most effective method of raising funds, and can provide great joy for the giver who sees the happiness that is brought to others by his or her donation.

We all ended the dinner feeling well-fed and informed.

The next day, there were four sessions:

- ✓ The technical considerations of starting a non-profit society affiliated with a Library, run by Dianne Kniss of Beaver Valley and Deb Thomas of Nelson
- ✓ The challenge of the triangular Friends, Board, Staff relationship with Noreen Ballantyne of North Vancouver District Library
- ✓ Methods of attracting, motivating and keeping Friends volunteers with a panel of speakers including Joy Huebert of Trail, Pat Adams of Cranbrook, Noreen Ballantyne of North Vancouver District Library and Margie Perks, a friend of Nelson Library
- ✓ A fund raising roundtable lead by Darlene Kalawsky of Castlegar Library.

As in most volunteer organizations, there are best practices. Some of these include:

- ✓ Clarity of roles: what do the Friends do? What does the Board do? What do staff do? All of these roles must be defined, written down, understood and accepted by all concerned.
- ✓ Appreciation: An essential practice that is still the cornerstone of motivation.
- ✓ A chance to contribute: All Friends members should be given opportunities to take on tasks they enjoy. There are many roles that can be played by volunteers, ranging from executive positions such as the Treasurer, Chairperson, and Secretary; to those jobs that may only come up once a year, such as helping at the book sale or selling raffle tickets.
- ✓ Promotion: Friends organizations should be promoted and marketed effectively in the community, through fliers, newspaper articles, posters, and events.
- ✓ Fun: Participating in the Friends should be as enjoyable as possible, with cookies, wine, coffee, fun, celebrations, and friendship being some of the possible ingredients.

Evaluations were returned by 17 participants. Participants described the conference as “informative, friendly, inspirational” and enjoyed the “spirit of enthusiasm, ideas, laughter, the speakers, the fund raising ideas, the great information and camaraderie” Suggestions included having small group discussions rather than just speakers, exercise breaks, and a slightly different room arrangement.

We were informed, inspired and networked. We hope this event will lay the groundwork for a Provincial conference that will continue to lead our Friends groups forward in supporting public libraries.