



## FOCAL POINT

ONTARIO LIBRARY  
ASSOCIATION  
SUPERCONFERENCE 2006

### Advocacy - turning passive support into educated action



Sally Reed, Executive Director Friends of Libraries. U.S.A.

“How lucky we are to be in a profession that changes lives, said Sally Reed. A professional librarian and Executive Director of Friends of Libraries U.S..A. Sally delivered a powerful advocacy message. “What we do matters in the world. We do have an important story to tell.” We were told advocacy is more important than ever before. Sally described the sometimes “hostile environment” libraries are facing, where online booksellers, mega-bookstores and Google operate in a more competitive environment.

“We have to begin to educate our public and our community, about the unique role libraries have played and continue to play,” said Sally. “We have to raise ourselves above the commercial.”

We can use policy issues such as ownership of information vs. fair use, intellectual freedom, threats to publicly funded libraries, budget cuts, and access to information. Sally told librarian Friends can help you if you let them know ahead of time what you need. “We haven’t exploited them enough,” said Sally, noting an uneducated citizenry will not rise up and support you. Friends have many avenues to demonstrate how important the library is to the community.

Talk about why the library matters to city leaders. Help them see what the city would look like without a library. Deliver an educational message, explaining and demonstrating what we have and why it matters. “Friends have a huge role to play in reaching out to the community and explaining why that matters to that community,” said Sally.

We can use studies to defend the need for a particular program and why it matters. Sally used the example of a summer program intended to get kids into library during summer, because studies show kids who don’t read over the summer lose 30% of the previous education, and may spend subsequent years in remedial learning.

Friends are the ones to convince your politicians that they must fund your library. Friends are taxpayers. They are the constituents that have power in their voices. Librarians can coach to engage your Friends in advocacy. “Word of mouth is not a bad marketing tool,” said Sally.

Friends can take out advertisements and write letters to the editor. Everyone can keep to the same talking points but everyone’s voice will sound different. You can use tip sheets and outline major talking points. Letter writing or telephone campaigns can help to change a politicians vote to Yes.

Sally provided a definition of advocacy - *turning passive support into educated action*. She outlined methods of reaching out to your community, using newsletters, press releases, mailing lists and advertisements, school outreach, external committees, to demonstrate the library’s contribution to the community and to build its credibility.

Use technology to educate instantly on issues. Have a PowerPoint presentation that can be used for council and community clubs. Use press releases – people don’t know and they won’t know if you don’t tell them! Create a ten point list on why the library matters or distribute copies of your annual report that demonstrates why your library matters.

## **Sally Reed - Revitalizing your Friends group**

Sally Reed's "Revitalizing your Friends group" session at the Ontario Library Association conference answered many of the questions posed by her audience. She facilitated a free-flow of dialogue about major issues.

The Ontario Library Boards' Association sponsored the Friday sessions.

For a more complete report please visit our website (<http://www.friendsoflibraries.ca/Conferences/OLA-2006/OLA-2006.htm> )



### **Pros and cons of having a Friends group**

"If it functions there is no con," said Sally. "Friends are a lay group who have nothing to gain but a better library enhanced programs and facilities. Their major fundraising campaigns are absolutely invaluable."

She described an "extreme example of how badly things can go" in telling Friends not to use the Friends mantle to pursue a political issue. "If you cannot support the library get out," she said. "Run for the Trustee position as they are the ones who have the governance."

She went on to say an understanding of the Friends role the Librarians role and the Trustees role is critical. Both Friends and Trustees will respect expertise of librarian.

She advised Librarians and Trustees to include friends group in the planning from the very beginning. "Once a year at the beginning of the year meet with friends and staff and talk about your vision for the next year," said Sally. "Where are you going and why." If you educate your Friends you are all on the same page, and Friends will look at how they see themselves playing into the realization of these goals.

Friends will be informed ambassadors in the community. She also suggested input from your Friends be accepted, as they are a ready-made focus group. It is important that they hear the decisions being made and understand why.

"FOLUSA recommends that there is always a Friends liaison," said Sally. The liaison is a non-voting member of the Library Board and is included on each agenda of the Board and the Friends meetings to update. It gives Friends a heads up on the issues and enables them to decide how to fit into the picture and support the library

## **Reenergize / Recruitment of ACTIVE members /How to get new thinking**

### Recruitment

- Send annual renewal letter – extend out to people who are not members. Include volunteer opportunities with a list of committees. Let them know what you are asking them to do by defining time commitment and providing a job description.
- Follow-up – Recruitment chair needs to pick up membership forms from treasurer and call each member. You could have a phone tree that is used once a month.
- Volunteer organizing evening – Meet chairs of committees and follow-up later – be a friend bring a friend
- Have an instant membership card at booksale. Out of those people we have ended up with really good active volunteers
- Send out brochure with municipal tax or utility bill
- Use brochure to list benefits of Friends, and explain how you could help us even more by joining, and outline volunteer opportunities. What have Friends done for the library? Why should they join? What are Friends of Libraries? Who you are and what you do. How much have Friends contributed?

### Structure for sustainability

- Create an executive board that has a committee-chair-elect, so that a person who has been there for a while has a built-in protégé with the understanding next year they are the next chair – ensures turnover
- Chair for 15 years – suggest getting an assistant
- Had general meeting/program next month executive next month general meeting/program – brief outline of volunteer opportunities – passed around clipboard with list of volunteer activities or committee openings currently available – might get ten names – could use that list to bring in chair elect – twist arms – it is all about that one on one
- Average age of volunteers is 32 (parents of kids in K-12). Forget that group and focus on newly retired

## **How to develop Junior/Teen Friends**

Sally suggested you treat teens as peers, and give them jobs that will appeal. Junior Friends can do fundraising on children's services, or they can be an advisory board. She described a group had a collection development committee and a facility planning committee. Each committee was given a budget, and one read reviews and selected books based on budget they had, while the other went shopping to pick out furniture within budget. The library became a place for kids to hang out, and they brought their friends.

### **North American Friends @ your library** – conference poster online

Abstract: Friends @ your library have a significant role to play as partners in advocacy, marketing, programming, volunteerism and support. Learn how national Friends of Libraries associations in Canada and the United States motivate and support local Friends groups in their efforts to preserve and strengthen libraries, by providing a support and resource network. Pick up their newsletters, and collect new program and promotional success stories from across the continent.

(<http://www.friendsoflibraries.ca/Conferences/OLA-2006/folusa-focal-poster.nnt>)



Val Marshall, Glen White, Peggy Hiscock and Jami van Haaften at our poster in the exhibit hall.



Sally Reed is joined by Wiarthon Friends Patti Roberts and Lynn Swatsky.



Friends of the St. Marys Public Library David Crawford and Dr. Gary Austin 2005 Honourable Award winner Random House of Canada Friend of the Year Award.



Sally was the guest of honour at an evening wine and cheese reception.



Many took the opportunity to meet with FOCAL President Peggy Hiscock



Harry Campbell, Past President, Ex Libris, Is joined by Trustees Maria Robinson of Oakville and Stephanie MacGregor of West Gwillimbury.