

Friends of Small Libraries

Speakers: Stephen Whelan, Chief Librarian, Uxbridge Township Public Library and Janis Bisback, C-Chair of Friends of the Hensall Public Library

We heard from two rural Friends groups in this Ontario Library Association session, and received two unique pictures of how Friends groups form and accomplish their goals.

Janis Brisback told us about Hensall, population 600, the bean capital of Ontario, located 50 miles north of London. Her community created a Friends group to demonstrate to municipal council that it really mattered to have a local library. They advocated to renovate an empty municipal building to keep a branch library in their community.

Expertise from contractors, welders, electricians, an upholsterer and a graphic artist were part of the free labour devoted to the project. Janis estimates \$150,000 - \$200,000 worth of volunteer hours were served. Local Kinsmen provided 750 hours of volunteer labour, and roofing material valued at \$9,000 was donated.

The library space grew from 360 square feet to 1200 square feet. They also made structural improvements to the municipal building, and added wheelchair accessibility.
(<http://www.huroncap.org/henlib/>)

Stephen Whelan, CEO of the Uxbridge Library, described the formation of the Uxbridge Friends group. He was interested in library volunteers forming a Friends association, and polled his colleagues and FOCAL to learn the pros and cons of having a Friends group (see FOCAL Point, Fall 2001).

They had to make some early decisions. A bank account was opened, and they had to decide who would have signing authority. They decided the process of incorporation and charitable status was a hassle for an association this small that did not yet have a full slate of officers. The library has a charitable donation number. So far their only executive member is a secretary. While Stephen agreed with those who commented his role with the Friends should be as liaison, for this first year he also acts as chair. He expressed concern that at the first Friends meeting Library Board members outnumbered Friends.

The Friends group was given some seed money from a recent booksale. Friends ran the next booksale, and have \$1700 in proceeds from the two booksales. In their first year they held an Awards Night reception to recognize honorary Friends. They signed up 20 new Friends at that event and had some momentum heading into the summer.

Stephen hung a large banner at the back of the meeting room which read "Friends of the Library Big Event" The sign hung in the library too, at a time when the "big event" was not yet known. Eventually in the fall they had a "Big Event Week", during which more members were recruited.

Since then monthly meetings two booksales, an amnesty day where Friends paid for fines, a chocolate making program and a gardening talk have occurred. The events are based on interest

of members, not on fundraising. Board members are no longer active in booksales and do not come to Friends' meetings.

Visit their website - <http://www.uxlib.com/friends.html>