

# Friends of the Library Book Sales

by Carol Passmore

**W**hether occurring once a year or four times, in the library meeting room or in a coliseum, lasting one day or three, the Friends of the Library (FOL) book sale is one of the most popular activities of

Friends groups in the United States. "Book sales can range from simple fund-raisers, at which donated volumes and library discards are sold at low prices, to elaborate affairs of regional importance, featuring rare works at substantial prices and thousands of bargain volumes laid out on long tables under a tent."<sup>1</sup> All your library needs to get in on an easy and entertaining but lucrative fundraising event is a small group of Friends, who, with the support of the library director, are willing to organize and carry out a book sale.

By definition, a book sale is the sale of used books, discarded from the library or donated by members of the community, by a nonprofit group, generally the Friends of the Library, with profits going to activities sponsored by the Friends group in support of their library. While many creative and entertaining variations on this basic activity have occurred, the sale of used books for fundraising purposes is the core activity. For more details than can be contained in this article, see either Taffy Bodman's account of book sales at the Chapel Hill Public Library<sup>2</sup> or the chapter on book sales in the *Friends of the Library Sourcebook*.<sup>3</sup>

## Why Have A Book Sale?

Raising money is the major reason for having a book sale; Friends of the Durham County Library raises approximately seventy-five percent of its annual budget from three book sales a year. But additional benefits are numerous. The book sale provides Friends groups with a book-oriented opportunity for volunteer activity and, as is often the case in a good volunteer experience, the chance for social activity as well. The sale can offer an opportunity to do public relations work for the library. Sales are both an easy way to get rid of discarded books and an opportunity to put books into the hands of eager readers who might not buy them at higher prices. It gives the Friends group a chance to gain new members. Finally, the book sale provides an excellent opportunity for Friends members and library staff to work together.

## Before The Sale

Ideally, the book sale committee is a standing committee of the FOL and is active during the entire year. The chairperson and the committee will develop and follow a calendar that assures that

the tasks mentioned below are accomplished. This should assure that everything necessary for a successful sale is done; thus, the committee should find life only slightly frantic in the days immediately before the sale.

## Collection of Books

Books for the sale come primarily from two sources. The first is discards from the library collection, which provides a steady assortment of books no longer needed in the library. The second source, donations from the community, is also a reliable way to get books. Acquiring donations requires publicity, which may include notices at all checkout desks in the system, news releases for both print and broadcast media, notices in monthly mailings from city/county offices or private businesses like banks, and posters placed in public areas.<sup>4</sup> A new sale will require more constant publicity to generate donations than a well-established sale. Publicity may indicate what items are not accepted (magazines, records, etc.) and where people may take donations. Clearly marked containers placed in visible locations at each library branch provide both publicity and a convenient location for dropping donations. In Durham, books can be taken straight to the library garage, which also serves as a sorting area and sales location.

## Sorting

Sorting of books into categories for the sale is best done all year as donations come in. Friends responsible for sorting may meet



on a regular basis or sort individually when their schedules permit. The easiest way to sort is directly to labeled shelves in a workroom or storage area. When shelves become full, books can be transferred to boxes and clearly labeled by category. Chapel Hill uses more than thirty categories, Durham just over twenty. A small sale can manage with a few broad categories. "The categories should be diversified enough to provide easy customer selection and yet not so numerous that confusion results when books are displayed at the sale."<sup>5</sup> When sorting into categories such as fiction, history, science, etc., don't forget an all-important category — discards. Durham throws out books in bad condition and anything that experience has shown won't sell, such as old text books, *Reader's Digest* condensed books, and magazines.

Library acquisitions staff have first claim on any donated books needed for the library collection and check donations on a regular basis. In Durham, several sorters are experienced enough to put aside books that are likely additions to the collection, thus saving staff time.

### Pricing

When pricing books, consider your audience. Durham's sale attracts bargain hunters and their pricing system is simple. All paperbacks are fifty cents; all hardbacks are one dollar. Last year's reference books are quite popular and are priced at two dollars, except for encyclopedias which are individually priced based on age, condition, completeness, and popularity of the set. A few special books are individually priced at higher rates — new popular fiction, sets of books, books of local interest, or autographed books might be placed on this special table. Chapel Hill attracts more serious book collectors and has a more complicated pricing system, with paperbacks priced at one-quarter of their original price and hardbacks priced by estimating their popularity.

### Storage

As donations and discards accumulate, storage space can become a concern. When storage space in the workroom or sorting area is exhausted, Friends should search for other space in the library or for room in the larger city/county government system. If these options don't work, private companies with warehouse space may be asked for temporary storage.

A second way to deal with a storage problem is to have an additional sale. If Durham has a large inventory left after a sale, they will have a one-day-only Bag Sale at which five dollars allows a shopper

to fill a grocery bag with books. Chapel Hill makes donations of leftover materials to local schools or other nonprofit groups that have use for them.

### Date and Place of Sale

When setting a date, one needs to consider national holidays as well as local events. Chapel Hill, in a university town, can't set its fall date without checking the UNC football schedule, the schedule for fall break, and the town's fall festival. Durham chooses to schedule its fall sale at the same time as the town's fall fair, as both events bring people to the downtown area. Once a date is picked, a facility must be reserved. Libraries needing to reserve public facilities may set a date as much as a year in advance.

### Publicity

Use the same venues for publicity as are used for collection of donations. Consider including announcements of the sale in the classified ads where yard sales are listed — Durham has found this to be worth the cost. Be on the lookout for other opportunities. A Durham Friend appeared on the local news with the weather man to publicize a recent sale. The book sale committee should be working closely with the Friends publicity committee and the library's public relations staff person.

### During the Sale

#### Volunteers

In addition to the book sale committee, volunteers are needed to set up, run, and clean up after the sale. This is the opportunity to involve the larger membership of the Friends of the Library and also library staff. In addition, groups from the community can be involved. Chapel Hill uses high school students to set up tables and put out books.

Volunteers serving as cashiers or shelf restockers should be scheduled in advance and reminded just before the sale.

#### Security

Security is an issue which must be considered. Since Durham's sale occurs at the library when it is open, money can be placed in the library as it accumulates. If necessary, the Friends treasurer can make arrangements for night bank deposits. Entrance and exits to the sales area should be located so that people cannot leave without paying.

### After the Sale

Friends members and staff should clean up immediately after the sale and return any borrowed equipment. The book sale committee should meet shortly after

the sale to note successes and things that need to be changed for the coming year, and to prepare a report for the next FOL Board meeting.

### Spend the Money

At Durham County Public Library, the FOL budget goes to support various activities such as the newsletter and the Writer's Series. But a significant chunk of it supports library projects such as a family literacy project, speakers' fees and other program expenses, and staff development activities. Twice a year, staff submit proposals for projects. These are reviewed by library division heads who evaluate them for

- 1) appropriateness of Friends support — no ongoing operational costs are approved;
- 2) completeness of proposal and sufficient justification;
- 3) potential impact on future budget requirements and on staff workload; and
- 4) how well proposals serve the objectives of the library's long-range plan.

The FOL Board then evaluates the proposals and chooses which will be supported.

### Variations on a Theme

Many possibilities exist around the standard book sale. Durham has a Friday evening preview sale for FOL members only and sells many memberships at the door. Chapel Hill has an auction of rare books on the evening before its sale begins. The sale of additional items, such as library tote bags or Friends of the Library T-shirts, also can take place. Other Friends groups have coupled their sale with additional activities such as a poster contest for children or a literary contest that takes place during the sale. Whatever you choose to do, plan to work hard, have fun, and sell those books.

### References

<sup>1</sup> Sandy Dolnick, ed. *Friends of the Library Sourcebook*. (Chicago: American Library Association, 1990), 87.

<sup>2</sup> Taffy Bodman, *Book Sale Biography* (Chapel Hill, N.C.: Friends of the Chapel Hill Library, 1983).

<sup>3</sup> Gloria M. Coningore and Margaret Mayer, "Book Sales," in *Friends of the Library Sourcebook*, ed. Sandy Dolnick, (Chicago: American Library Association, 1990), 109-120.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 109-110.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 110.