
Take Out/Free Delivery!

by Frannie Ashburn

In-house programs for children, teens, and adults are a staple of public library service and cover myriad topics in a variety of formats. Programming formats include reading aloud to children, book discussions, lectures, exhibits, slide/film showings, readers' theater (reading aloud of short stories adapted to script format), storytelling, readings by authors/poets, poetry "slams," exhibits, musical performances, and demonstrations of all kinds — from how to identify poisonous snakes to how to trace your ancestry. Libraries tap their own and outside resources to provide programs to intrigue and inform their communities. All of these programs get people *in* to the library where they also learn more about the library's amazing resources — expanded via the Internet to include virtually the whole world. In addition to bringing people into the library, many of these programs are ready-made outreach vehicles.

Outreach to individuals and to people in institutions and organizations who are not "regular" library patrons enhances the public library's role as a good citizen in its community. It is a way for libraries to recruit new users and new supporters, to make new friends, and to identify new resources. Programs used as outreach also cover many topics and take many forms, and the projects listed below are by no means an exhaustive — or even a complete — list. They're examples intended to pique your interest and — if you don't already — to encourage you to see programming as potential outreach.

Storytime/Storytelling

These programs take place anywhere librarians know (or even suspect!) that children are gathered: daycare centers, health departments, housing developments, and schools. Smart Start collaborative projects in communities all over the state include fine examples of programming outreach.

Reading Incentive Programs and Readers' Theater

Willie Nelms, director of the Sheppard Memorial Library in Greenville (Pitt County), provides information on a couple of his library's special outreach projects:

Since 1995, Sheppard Memorial Library has operated the Resource Room at the Greenville Housing Authority Moyewood Cultural and Recreational Center. The resource room functions as a small library and is open 2:30 p.m. – 5:30 p.m. Monday through Friday. Over the past four years and as part of this agreement, the public library has offered reading incentive

programs and readers' theater programs for children living in public housing. The library offers these services on a year-to-year contract basis with the Greenville Housing Authority. In essence, the Greenville Housing Authority outsources its library service through the public library.

Over the past five years, the Friends of the Sheppard Memorial Library and the Friends of Joyner Library at East Carolina University have conducted the Celebrity Readers' Theater as a fundraising event. Well-known local citizens (television personalities, civic, and political leaders) are readers in plays performed in a readers' theater format. The most recent production occurred on Sunday, February 7, 1999. It was attended by 175 people and generated more than \$5,000. The profits from the event are split equally between the two Friends of the Library groups. This is a unique event because it involves a cooperative effort of the friends

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groups from an academic library and a public library and also because it uses local celebrities as the performers. Over the years this event has generated increasing public interest, and local citizens consider it an honor to be the readers.¹

Reading and Discussion Programs

For more than a dozen years, North Carolina public libraries have hosted *Let's Talk About It*, reading and discussion programs led by humanities scholars/discussion facilitators. These scholars are professors from area colleges, universities, and community colleges who bring experience, expertise, and enthusiasm to their role as informed guides for public audiences. Programs are attended by die-hard readers ("Put it in my hands and I'll read it!"), by aficionados of the author or the subject of the book, and by innocent bystanders who get dragged to the programs by enthusiastic friends and then become converts themselves. Discussion is the focus of the programs, and this discussion is active, energetic, and sometimes difficult to bring to a halt!

The popular *Let's Talk About It* program model (adapted to numerous other reading/discussion projects) uses interesting speakers and discussions to "lure" out-of-school adults in to the library where librarians also showcase the wealth of library services, materials, and resources. The hoped-for result is the library's being regarded as a lifelong learning center in the community — a place where people gather to engage in the thoughtful consideration of ideas. With hundreds of successful programs in their repertoire, librarians began to think of other places to do this type of programming — places where groups already were gathered — and senior citizen centers were among the first on

the list.

During the 1995-98 *Poetry Spoken Then and Now* project, which brought scholar-led reading and discussion programs on modern American poetry to public libraries in North and South Carolina, some programs were held in senior citizen centers. These programs were a win/win situation for everyone involved. The library got good publicity in the local media for outreach to the senior center, freed its meeting room for other uses, and provided an accessible program location for evening events (easily-accessed facilities and spacious, well-lit parking lots and buildings often are advantages of retirement center locations). By hosting programs open to the general public, the senior center provided a ready-made, well-organized, quality program for its residents (a real plus for the center's program director!), and showed off its facilities and services to potential residents who might never have visited them otherwise. Participants benefited most of all. A local library coordinator reported of her experience at a South Carolina retirement center that 60% of the audience members came from the town and ranged in age from 16 to 70.² This diverse mixture was a wonderful asset to the discussions. Residents enjoyed talking with local people whom they might not have met otherwise, and the "locals" enjoyed discussing poetry with folks they did not see on a regular basis. Retirees from other parts of the country found the programs an excellent way to learn about poetry and about the people and culture outside their immediate home.

Some of these poetry programs were held in workplace sites because they are particularly adaptable to a lunch hour format — scholar and participants gather for a sandwich and discussion. One noontime series was held

at a hospital and was open to staff and to the public. The scholar who led the programs was "amazed and heartened at the variety of people interested enough in poetry to devote six weeks, worth of lunch hours to it."³ This group, too, was a mixture — half were hospital employees and half were from the community.

Workplace programs also are a win/win situation for everyone involved. The workplace sites prided themselves on providing lifelong learning opportunities for their employees, enabled local people to utilize their resources and facilities for an educational enrichment opportunity, and hosted a quality program they did not have to develop (or pay for!). The library got good publicity in the local media for outreach to workers who have limited leisure time for cultural/educational opportunities and promoted its resources and services to people who might not have learned of them otherwise. And for participants? Interactive, stimulating programs were delivered to them free of charge at their place of work. Now *that's* outreach!!!

For information on book-related programming in and out of the library, contact Frannie Ashburn, Director, North Carolina Center for the Book, State Library of North Carolina, 109 East Jones Street, Raleigh, North Carolina 27601-2807; phone: 919-733-2570; fax: 919-733-8748; e-mail: <fashburn@library.dcr.state.nc.us>.

References

¹ E-mail from Willie Nelms to Frannie Ashburn, Jan. 20, 1999.

² Frances L. Ashburn, "Poetry Spoken Then and Now Final Performance Report (Raleigh, NC: North Carolina Center for the Book, State Library of North Carolina, 1999), 6, typewritten.

³ Ibid.

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