

Confessions of a Library Director (why Friends are friends indeed!)

by **Mary Sizemore**
Director, Hickory Public Library

When Alice Spuller asked if I could write a short article about the importance of Friends groups from a library director's perspective, I immediately said "**YES!**" for two reasons: First, I'd do anything for Alice Spuller: she is a true gem, the epitome of what being a Friend is all about. Second, I knew it would be easy to write, because I could think of countless ways Friends impacted the everyday work of the public libraries in which I've worked over the past twenty years. However, in the interest of brevity, I'll list the top five.

THE FINANCIAL SUPPORT of Friends groups allows libraries to provide programs and services that otherwise would be unaffordable. Think of all the great programs you've attended over the years at your public library. Chances are those events were funded at least in part by the local Friends. Best selling author visits, genealogy workshops, professional theatrical or musical productions, book discussions, hands-on programs such as wreath making or holiday cooking tips – these are just a few examples of Friends-sponsored programs one sees every day across North Carolina. What would our summer reading programs be like without Friends support? Pretty bland, I'm afraid. But thanks to Friends, clowns, magicians, scientists, dancers, actors, storytellers, puppeteers, writers, poets, as well as snakes, spiders, birds, bugs, dogs and other critters appear in libraries throughout the summer in activities that encourage reading and foster a love of libraries and learning.

THEY FREELY GIVE THE MOST PRECIOUS GIFT – their time. We call on our Friends first when volunteers are needed for any special library project, such as handing out customer service surveys or providing extra manpower for major events. In a true example of going above and beyond, some of the Hickory Friends have even donned Curious George and other costumes to participate alongside library staff in the annual holiday parade. And speaking as one who has also worn these big costumes on several occasions, I can assure you it is not fun – at all.

FRIENDS ARE OUR MOST EFFECTIVE ADVOCATES with state and local funding authorities. Legislators listen to you because you speak voluntarily (and passionately) as a member of the community and a constituent. When you express your belief that public libraries are vital to the social, economic and educational well-being of a community, your words carry weight. As a library director, I know that I can count on my Friends to contact our state legislators at a moment's notice when necessary, which they have done on a number of occasions. I cannot emphasize strongly enough how important this is.

FRIENDS PROVIDE SUPPORT AND ENCOURAGEMENT for library staff. While generally rewarding, working with the public can be stressful. When Friends visit the library regularly, know staff by name, and are friendly and positive in their interactions, it means a lot. The Hickory Friends take this one step further by surprising staff on a regular basis with small tokens of appreciation. These unexpected gifts are real morale-boosters.

The importance of Friends groups to libraries cannot be overstated, and we cannot thank you enough for what you do each and every day to help us serve our communities in the best possible way.