

## The Librarian's Desk . . .

In Sherborn, there is an innovative corporation of educators, lawyers, development directors, executives, public relations specialists, artists, social workers, information technologists, money managers, and entrepreneurial homemakers who gather monthly to discuss interesting ways to direct community down-time. The next thing you know, a respite center takes the initiative and collects pennies to contribute to a drive that helps build schools in Pakistan and Afghanistan. A group of high school students organizes a drop-off spot to collect donated outdoor gear to assist with disabled youths' enjoyment of outdoor expeditions. Dozens of residents sponsor books to honor the well-lived life of a neighbor. Artists' exhibit and contribute their creations to help perk philanthropy. Spring arrives, and daffodils sprout and shine in new patches, quietly planted by industrious hands, and bulbs are sold to fund the perpetuity of plantings. An organization for sustainable consumerism donates funding towards green building maintenance. Used book donations are collected, sorted, and delivered to prison libraries.

I am describing the influence of the Friends of the Library organization, a volunteer board which raises funds for programs of interest to the community and encourages civic involvement in the Library. In addition to raising the vital funds that directly support our time-honored services, the Friends' work presents the community with the opportunity to consider the Library as a place to promulgate their own benevolent activities that reach outside the Library walls.

Certainly the big event "One Book, Two Towns, Three Cups of Tea" and the subsequent Pennies for Peace drive is one of the latest examples. Partnering with the Dover-Sherborn schools, the Friends of the Sherborn Library helped the Librarians sponsor events to involve residents in the all-school reading of Greg Mortenson's book Three Cups of Tea. The Librarians invented "Culture Capsules," multi-media kits that consisted of materials for all interest levels on Afghan and Pakistani cultures and offered spiced tea, relevant movies, and dozens of extra paperbacks to facilitate the Town's one-book reading experience with the students. To involve younger members of the community, the Children's Librarian hosted a "Pennies for Peace" drive. Many young philanthropists emptied their piggy banks, fascinated by watching the jars fill with every pour of coins. Mortenson's Central Asia Institute is a charitable organization which has raised funds to build more than 78 schools in remote regions of Afghanistan and Pakistan, where once there were none. Sherborn's participation in the year-long drive to support Mortenson's humanitarian work culminated in the author's appearance at the Regional High School, including a dinner which was a sell-out.

Sherborn has a unique tradition of utilizing its public library as an instrument of collective goodwill. In 1960, when the Dowse Memorial Library celebrated 100 years of the Town's establishment of a public library, Sherborn held a book drive for the Balme Library of the University College of Ghana, three years after Ghana became the first sub-Saharan country in colonial Africa to gain its independence from the British. How many "Among Friends" readers remember this event? The Ambassador of Ghana to the United Nations visited Sherborn to accept our gift of 1,000 books to their new library and some financial donations. As Sherborn's population was only 2,000 inhabitants at the time, it is all the more remarkable that such a large quantity of books was collected. The Librarian for the Balme Library wrote our Trustees to convey the University's warmest thanks, and proposed to print a special bookplate attributing each book to Sherborn, Massachusetts, USA.

In 1961, the Embassy of Ghana wrote to the Trustees of the Dowse Memorial Library, offering to explore the possibility of the Town of Sherborn, Massachusetts twinning with a town in Ghana. Sherborn's counsel replied "Sherborn is a community of approximately 2,000 inhabitants . . . from a development standpoint it is essentially a rural community

and a number of the inhabitants are engaged in farming. However, a large number of its inhabitants commute daily to Boston and other urban centers and are engaged in all facets of business and commercial enterprises as well as the professions. Accordingly, the community is more sophisticated, intelligent, and progressive than might be expected of a rural town. I think the Town is essentially interested in continuing the expression of international goodwill which motivated the Town Library to donate books and money.” Fast forward to 2007, and Ghana celebrates its Golden Jubilee of 50 years of independence. I am certain that the many well-read graduates of the University worked hard to preserve their democracy.

Three smaller initiatives served to offer charity closer to home. When a school library in Louisiana was destroyed by fire, Sherborn came to its aid. For one week, Library patrons were encouraged to “Make a Fine Contribution” – it was optional for patrons to deposit their overdue fines into a pickle jar to send that school library a cumulative donation. Permission to re-direct those coins was enthusiastically endorsed by Sherborn’s financial officers and the Advisory Committee, even though every cent has always been greatly needed locally. The Friends of the Library have held holiday book drives to benefit The Walker School in Needham. A children’s fund located in Appalachia has also been the beneficiary of the Friends’ book drives of new or like-new books.

While the Friends raise funds to make the programs at the Library possible, they also deserve the credit for pitching in to do much of the hands-on work necessary to make the programs happen. The Friends work free of charge, doubling the return of your membership dues in the Friends’ organization as an expression of support for the Library.

I daresay all this goodness is the result of books. Books do indeed change lives. The process of reading seems to deliver a direct message to some part of the intellect that responds in inspiration. Inspired persons find each other at libraries and, for Sherborn Library readers, this meeting of minds has frequently resulted in turning the inspiration outward.

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