



What is a Friend of the Library?

**a Friend with a capital F is more than
a person with a library card**

Library Friends groups are volunteer champions of the library. They work closely with the library's administrative staff to offer valuable feedback and advice concerning their community's library needs, to publicize library events, and to lobby government and philanthropic sources for adequate support for libraries.

The Friends work in cooperation with library contacts on activities such as raising money to supplement existing library resources, and assisting with special events. Many Friends groups have either periodic or ongoing used book sales to raise funds.

History

Archeologists have found buried libraries that date back about 6000 years, shortly after the Babylonians invented writing, carving messages and records into clay tablets. No doubt there were librarians then, as dedicated as our librarians are now -- and lay people who hung around and helped the pros for the love of books and learning.

Throughout history, books and libraries have increased in importance; since the invention of movable type in the middle of the fifteenth century, the role of volunteers in establishing and maintaining libraries has also grown.

The first group known to call itself "Friends of the Library" (well, "Les Amis de la Bibliothèque") was organized in Paris in 1913. The concept and the name spread around the world. (As you read, especially "cozy" mysteries, watch how often the movers and shakers in the town belong to the Friends of the Library!)

Each Friends group in the U.S. is independent, but there are a few national organizations that offer support and assistance, like the American Library Association (www.ala.org) and Friends of Libraries U.S.A. (www.folusa.org) which "provides resources, services and networking opportunities for Friends, trustees, and foundations across the country to increase and enhance their efforts on behalf of libraries of all types."

In Pennsylvania we also have the Pennsylvania Citizens for Better Libraries (PCBL). They hold an annual free workshop for library trustees and Friends at which ideas for helping improve our libraries are shared. The workshop in Western PA usually takes place in April. For information watch www.pcbipa.org.

"In the end, it will be those who love and use libraries that ensure a safe and secure future for them. Like their forebears one hundred years ago, Friends continue to raise money, write [applications for] grants for capital expenses and library programs, persuade local governments to provide sufficient support for library operations, and create political pressure to [enact] laws that allow libraries to serve the public most effectively. As library needs become more complex and more acute, Friends and lay advocates will need to become more vocal and more united. "

from the FOLUSA website