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Nanci is currently reading *Time Untime* by Sherrilyn Kenyon.

Perspectives offers varied viewpoints on subjects of interest to the public library profession.

One Book/One Community Programs, Part II

In the July/August issue of *Public Libraries* (volume 51, number 4), I brought you stories from three public libraries that had sponsored One Book/One Community programs. As promised, here are four more.

Reads Rule: How Good Books Built Our New Library

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Once upon a time, the Chatham (N.C.) Community Library (CCL) was a 5,000-square-foot building bursting at the seams. We had six computers for a service population of nearly 3,000. People didn't spend a lot of time at our library because it was hard to find a parking space, let alone a place to sit.

Now our building is about five times as big—a state-of-the-art, dual-purpose, green public and academic library. And though it came about largely due to forward thinking by our library director, county commissioners, and the community college where we're located, I don't think it's too much of a stretch to suggest that it had its genesis in our community reading programs.

It all started in 2004, when our Friends of the Library proposed that we try to repeat the success of our inaugural community read, which was based on Sue Monk Kidd's *The Secret Life of Bees*. People had been so enthusiastic about the program that it generated the urge to create a bigger, better event.

The best community read projects we've had were based on books chosen by selection committees whose members represented a cross-section of our library's service community. Although we used survey-style ballots that rated specific characteristics of each book the committee considered, what really counted was the enthusiasm committee members felt for the stories. When we chose *The Kite Runner* for our 2005 community read, it was because we thought its compelling story would resonate with readers. It's true that the book had a lot to teach us about Afghanistan, racism, families, war, loyalty, and other issues; but our hope was that people's passion for the characters and situations would start a chain reaction of reading.

Once people were buzzing about *The Kite Runner*, we tried to sustain their enthusiasm by supplying books that provided additional context. Some of the discussions based on these supplementary titles, such as Asne Seierstad's *The Bookseller of Kabul*, provided a forum for people who wanted to explore political issues. We also tried to include related books for different ages and held events for children based on

Rukhsana Khan's *The Roses in My Carpets* and Deborah Ellis's *Parvana's Journey* and *The Breadwinner*.

Our library's relationships with local businesses and community agencies were essential components of our efforts. Due to the lack of meeting space, the planning committee met at a local café or our local independent bookstore. Holding large-scale reading and signing events in our library was out of the question. So our local independent bookstore helped get our community on authors' tour schedules and provided accommodations and access to a venue for the reading. Local retail businesses agreed to display copies of the books along with information about events associated with the community read.

One of our most important partnerships was with the local arts council. A defining characteristic of our community is that it is brimming with artists of every stripe, so we invited artists to create works in response to passages from community read books. Creations inspired by *The Kite Runner* included paintings, pottery, weavings, mosaic, and even a replica of an Afghan truck made from majolica. It was moving to watch the author's reactions to the art at the exhibition that preceded his reading.

We tried to reach out to different demographics. Our *Kite Runner* community event, "An Evening in Kabul," held in our community's senior center, featured authentic Afghan cuisine. The room was richly decorated with tapestries, rugs, and other art lent by community members who had traveled or lived in the Middle East. At a children's program, we had an opportunity to try walking in a burka and to talk to an exchange student from Afghanistan.

Very few of the programs we planned were actually held at the library due to space constraints, but we made sure to reinforce the fact that these were library and Friends of the library events. The energy and enthusiasm of the organizers attracted a large pool of volunteers, which grew with each subsequent event. It also meant that more people were seeing firsthand that our library was just too small. The community reads generated a lot of posi-

tive publicity, which helped people who hadn't thought much about the library as a community gathering place.

Following the 2005 community read, our Friends of the library group began a vigorous fundraising campaign for a new library. Over the course of the next five years, they raised more than \$600,000 for our new building, which opened in the fall of 2010.

It's true that a lot more went into building our new library than programs and fundraising efforts. However, I would argue that the wellspring of community spirit that resulted in our new building grew out of our reading programs. It took four huge plaques to include the names of the more than three hundred donors who contributed amounts ranging from \$5 to \$50,000. Patrons often bring out-of-town visitors in and guide them through the building with pride of ownership. And to think, it all began with a good book.

Easton Reads Together

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At the end of 2009, the Ames Free Library (AFL) in North Easton, Massachusetts, not only moved back into its historical 1883 Richardson building following an extensive restoration, but also was able to successfully apply for an On the Same Page grant. The ensuing project, which was called "Easton Reads Together," was exactly what the library needed to get past the disruptiveness of the move and helped AFL accomplish greater harmony than it had aimed for—in ways that were both expected and surprising.

While getting the community to read and communicate with each other on a common theme was the professed reason for pursuing the grant, the more profound purpose of the project was to firmly establish the library as a community center. The library had newly minted its byline, "Where the Community Connects," and the grant plan aimed at transmuting the

spirit of that byline into a more tangible reality. That purpose was targeted and fulfilled to a rewarding extent.

The choosing of One Book for the entire town can be a complex undertaking. It can also be simple. Director Madeline Miele Holt discerned that environmental concerns and natural resources were valued in Easton, one of the first towns to have signed onto the Community Preservation Act of 2000. With this in mind, two nonfiction books were selected with the express aim of offering the Easton community an opportunity to explore themes related to the importance of the natural world in their lives and in the upbringing of their children. The books were *Last Child in the Woods* by Richard Louv and *A Walk in the Woods: Rediscovering America on the Appalachian Trail* by Bill Bryson.

Given the topicality of the books, the library was able to set up heretofore unexploited relationships with well over a dozen town and community organizations in a successful bid to present a cohesive and widespread choice of topical programming for Easton residents over a six-month period. Formal meetings were held at the library with representatives from town departments such as the Department of Recreation, community organizations such as the Easton Garden Club, school groups, town organizations such as the Easton Cultural Council, nonprofit institutions such as the Natural Resources Trust (NRT), and media such as Easton Community Access Television. The meetings were followed by email and telephone conversations—the purpose of both being to set up programs relevant to the library's title choices for "Easton Reads Together," as well as fostering cooperation between agencies, organizations, and community groups that typically tended to stay within their own backyards. The library helped publicize town-wide programs supportive of the initiative and library brochures listed a collation of events around town that propagated the ideas in the books. For a town that had recently defeated the library's fourteen-year quest to expand the library building, this level of cooperation was both humbling and hugely exhilarating.

In 2008, the library had worked with fewer than five agencies. By the end of the project in 2010, the library had joint programs and other collaborations with seventeen groups. The project had aimed at a 150 percent increase in cooperative ventures, but was able to achieve an increase of 220 percent.

The second purpose of the project was to shine a much-needed spotlight on what is Easton's most attractive and unique feature—its abundance of natural resources and over 3,000 acres of conservation land. The titles selected for the project were all about the benefits of enjoying nature. It seemed appropriate to get a community where more than 4,000 children are of school-going age to engage in a dialogue about nature-deficit disorders, as laid out in Richard Louv's *Last Child in the Woods*, and make the most of the natural world as so delightfully described in Bill Bryson's *A Walk in the Woods*.

As library staff were too busy moving back and settling into a renovated building during the first few months of 2010, programming was not launched until April 2010. At that point, the library released an eye-catching brochure that listed more than thirty programs ranging from panel discussions and formal lectures, to outdoor activities like kite flying, bird watching, nature walks, and making boats. These cooperative programs were hosted by different town agencies and organizations. The library had planned only sixteen of the listed programs. More programs were added later by agencies that were unable to meet the April deadline for printing the brochure. About 54 percent of grant funds were expended on program activities.

A group of adult residents ranging widely in ages and walks of life came together to form an "Easton Reads Together Reading Group" and spent time reading, studying, and discussing the books. They then went on to develop a set of questions that the community could use as a launch pad for thoughtful discussions.

This was followed by a panel discussion on the books, by speakers selected for their different strengths and perspectives. Professor Sue Mooney of Stonehill

College used Louv's book as part of her teaching curriculum for more than four years and was intimate with its ideas. Jen Cummings, executive director of Easton's Natural Resources Trust was a practitioner who put into practice the core of Louv's exhortations to get kids out into nature. And Chet Raymo, Easton's erudite author, provided inspirational and philosophical flavor to the discussion.

With a healthy build-up of discussions on the ideas in the book well underway, the library introduced a keynote speaker, Professor David Sobel, of Antioch University. Sobel, a thinker and author of similar books, was also a friend and go-to spokesperson for Louv's theory on nature-deficit disorders.

While these three activities provided the intellectual underpinning for the ideas contained in the books selected for "Easton Reads Together," the bulk of all programming was aimed at "nature immersion," that is, getting residents to physically experience Easton's many resources. Multiple walks targeted different audiences. Foraging for edible plants in the Oliver Ames Parker Conservation Area of North Easton targeted the Foodie Group; tracing the history of Easton's ancient geological past by observing rock trails through the Sheep Pasture targeted the history buffs; and trekkers were attracted to the series of guided walks planned along various lesser-known conservation trails. The NRT hosted weekend nature walks, bird-watching forays, kite flying, butterfly safaris, and picnics featuring boat making at the Sheep Pasture pond.

The final set of programs were planned to enhance the relevance and joys of nature in a more general sense. Programs featuring pastel painting, music, storytelling, puppet shows, films, and talks were topically selected to reinforce the relevancy of nature in the lives of children and adults.

In sum, the grant was used to develop thematically consistent programming between April and October 2010. These programs served to consistently spotlight Easton's natural resources and spark interest in the reading of the two selected

books. Programming statistics testified to the popularity of these programs, while the interest in reading the books could be gauged by the circulations recorded for both titles during the six months of programming.

The programs were promoted in a number of ways:

- First of all, the attractive customized logo mentioned earlier, was created so that it would provide the necessary branding for all "Easton Reads Together" activities.
- More than four thousand program brochures were distributed directly to public school children through the Superintendent of Schools office.
- A personalized email was sent to every teacher in the public school system, alerting him or her to the urgency of the selected books' messages on the importance of nature in the lives of children.
- Stacks of program brochures were made available at public places such as the post office, banks, grocery stores, Town Hall, collaborating agencies such as the NRT and Children's Museum, and of course, at the library itself.
- Richard Louv's public relations office was contacted. They proved to be very helpful and provided the library with large posters as well as five thousand bookmarks that highlighted the main points of the book.
- Grant funds were well utilized with a much-needed outdoor billboard that advertised weekly programs and served as a critical visual reminder to repeatedly alert passersby about what was going on at the library.
- Individual flyers for programs were created and displayed both at the library and other community billboards.
- Handy sized postcards were also created for each event so people could carry away the information

in hard copy to stick on their refrigerators.

- A weekly column on "Easton Reads Together" was set up in the local newspaper, *Easton Journal*, with a list of forthcoming events celebrating the selected books.
- Press releases were sent to general media so that coverage appeared in papers such as *The Enterprise* as well as *The Boston Globe*.
- Individual agencies marketed the cooperative ventures using their own publicity methods.
- The library e-newsletter, sent to 4,500 subscribers, was used to publicize events, as was the *Town Crier*, the town's online newsletter.
- The library website also provided easy access to event information with homepage information and links for "Easton Reads Together," as well as individual listings in our online calendar.
- 20.7 percent of grant funds were expended on publicity, which included supplies such as card stock paper for flyers and postcards.
- Eighty copies of both books were purchased with grant and library funds and put into circulation as well as made available for purchase. Copies of both books were also placed in the local post office and banks with the offer to "take home and return here with comments." Those books continue their peripatetic journey around Easton to this day.
- 25.5 percent of grant funds were expended on books and informational material.

In addition to the success of the programs and discussions, grant activities and the process of fulfilling grant requirements led to some surprisingly positive results that had not been planned or targeted at the start of the grant.

For one, the steady and highly publi-

cized focus on natural resources in Easton, as generated by the library, helped revive other town department initiatives that had flagged over the years. The Land Use Agent, for example, collaborated with the library to plan for the update of a brochure/map showing entrances to conservation areas in Easton. The update, with further collaboration from the town's GIS/CAD specialist, was to support the library's goal of providing easy access and knowledge of Easton's available resources.

A second unexpected benefit was the library's institutional maturing in the art of effective programming. It was found that providing an overarching theme to programs was very catchy. The "Easton Reads Together" framework allowed the library the latitude of offering programs that varied from puppetry to xeriscaping and yet provided the strength of presenting it all as one powerful composite.

All programs were branded by a distinctive, personalized logo, designed by the library's gifted administrative assistant, Michelle Duprey. The logo became publicity shorthand for nature themed programs at the library. Performers, town officials, and organizations interested in the topic began associating the library with such programs and asked for an opportunity to collaborate. When the Easton Cultural Council wanted to create an outdoor evening for the community, they set up a series of lantern making workshops at the library and organized a lantern walk around town that culminated at the library garden. When resident Martin Keogh, who had attended a number of the programs, wanted to publicize his book on preserving the environment, he arranged for a program at the library and an interview with the library director on the local cable show, *Book Lovers of Easton*.

Given the success, the library has adopted this winning programming strategy as a template: Establish a theme for the year, collect programs associated with it, and collate it all in one effective brochure that helps "brand" the theme.

Finally, the success of grant activities and increase in town communication over issues brought about by grant activity, led

to the simple yet profound realization that ideas beget more ideas. Inspiration and commitment are contagious. "One of our staff members also had an idea which involves kids reading some selected nature books and having family discussion with their caring adults," said Paula Peterson, executive director of the Children's Museum in Easton, as she commented on how staff members at the Museum were fired up with ideas following the library's launch of "Easton Reads Together." The Conservation Commission hired an intern to start walking Easton's trails with a handheld GPS device to help develop more user-friendly information for hikers. An NRT member, who attended the talks on mushrooms in the region as well as a talk on foraging, planned to sponsor some of the same talks at the NRT.

Did this project achieve what it had hoped to achieve at the start of the grant initiative? Yes—beyond expectations. This conclusion was reached based on a summary of some of the primary objective statistical markers listed below as well as the subjective feedback received from Easton residents and external organizations:

- "Easton Reads Together" programs attracted well over five thousand people in the months between April and September 2010, marking a 364 percent increase in program attendance.
- The library was able to increase cooperative town ventures by 220 percent in the grant year. Seventeen local agencies, organizations, and town departments came together to provide "Easton Reads Together" with a town-wide investment in the success and progress of the initiative.
- More than 95 percent of the targeted audience recorded a positive change in their perceptions/attitudes to Easton's natural resources as a direct result of "Easton Reads Together" programs.
- The selected books were circulated, and presumably read, 444

times. This readership did not include people who purchased copies of the book or those who informally "borrowed" the books placed in banks and the post office.

- The skeleton of facts was robustly fleshed out by the astonishingly large number of positive statements received by library staff from both residents and co-operating organizations.
- The library was awarded the 2010 "Elise Ames Parker Friend of Conservation Award" for the "Easton Reads Together" initiative and was selected to be presented to the Commissioners of the Massachusetts Board of Library Commissioners at their June 2011 meeting.

Medfield Reads, Converses, Creates, and Comes Together

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When the Medfield (Mass.) Public Library (MPL) decided to undertake our first One Town, One Book program, we thought big. We began the process with soliciting community partnerships and writing a grant for Library Services and Technology Act (LSTA) funds. Members of the newly formed Medfield Cultural District, consisting of the library and several key town institutions, met to discuss ways to make the project a collaborative success. Our vision was to foster connection by bringing both individuals and organizations into a deeper sense of community. As project

director, my goal and mantra was to build community in a fun and meaningful way.

A diverse book selection committee considered titles that had been nominated for a Massachusetts Book Award and lent themselves to the aforementioned fun and meaningful community-building. Aaron Lansky's memoir *Outwitting History: the Amazing Adventures of a Man Who Rescued a Million Yiddish Books* was our quirky, yet fitting, finalist. The book details the plight of Yiddish culture and language after half of all Yiddish speaking Jews were murdered in the Holocaust and the majority of survivors left Eastern Europe, scattering across the globe, many settling in the United States.

When Lansky was a college student studying Jewish culture in the 1970s he discovered that Yiddish books were being discarded or neglected as their elderly Yid-

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dish speaking owners died off. As is often the case with immigrant families in America, the language of the old country was infrequently being passed on to subsequent generations. Lansky, young and with few resources, made it his mission to collect, preserve, and promote these endangered books and the culture they represent. He did this in large part by collecting books from the homes of elderly Yiddish speakers. As he did so, he sat down at kitchen tables and listened to tales of immigration, literature, politics, families—all the aspects that make up an individual's life and culture. *Outwitting History* is a warm, humorous, informative, and inspiring book. It provided a ready conduit for sparking explorations of immigration, language, and cultural transmission.

Once we chose a book it was time to plan programs, gather advisors, and alert the press. Marketing efforts included weekly press releases, Facebook updates, email blasts, posters, flyers, bookmarks, buttons, bumper stickers, and book bags. We also delivered the message door-to-door at various businesses and organizations around town—bringing promotional materials to barbershops, the high school, bakeries, pizza parlors, the senior center, faith groups, and banks.

"Medfield Reads" kicked off with a concert in January. The band Notorious played music and instruments from around the world and told stories of how one musical form influenced another, and of how cultures diverge or merge to create something new. The library had a full house and the audience reception was very enthusiastic. The synergy between the themes of "Medfield Reads" and the concert were clear and the buzz began.

From that first event onwards, a fantastic synergy of preparation and serendipity combined to create meaningful and fun ways of connecting one program to the next, idea to idea, and one neighbor to another. The library, together with many wonderful partners, provided a lineup of quality programs. Medfield enjoyed concerts, films, workshops, storytellers, an oral history project, author visit, art shows, and many other events.

The library hosted several book discussion groups, but we have also sent out a "librarian-on-loan" to extend the conversation beyond the library walls. As the program director I facilitated discussions in homes, at the senior center, and at a local church with an interfaith group. I also gave book talks at a Lions Club dinner and senior center breakfast. Participants talked about language and how much cultural perspectives are shaped by our vocabulary. We ruminated on immigration, what we gain and what we lose as generations of newcomers assimilate. And we talked about what was and what was not passed on within our own families.

The Medfield Historical Society really brought the discussion of immigration home, putting together an exceptionally well-researched program about Medfield's own immigration history. Residents participated to tell the story of the various ethnic and religious groups that populated the area through the years and each groups' struggles and triumphs. The library offered genealogy workshops to introduce patrons to databases, enabling them to discover their own stories. One grandmother stated that she was taking the class so that she could pass the family story on to her grandchildren.

The local Zullo Art Gallery put out a call for art inspired by the theme of cultural roots, the response was a show full of striking, thoughtful works from professional artists in Medfield and surrounding communities. The library hosted a show by an artist whose work explores early twentieth century Russian-Yiddish cultural beliefs surrounding pregnancy and childbirth. A third artist installed a Yiddish text sculpture path throughout the Medfield Cultural District this past summer. Each show built upon and complemented the others, bringing a breadth and depth of visual response to the themes of "Medfield Reads."

The library, with generous funding through the Friends of MPL and LSTA funds, hit the road for a field trip to the National Yiddish Book Center (NYBC), founded by Aaron Lansky. Housed in Amherst, Massachusetts, the NYBC serves as

a sorting, selling, and preservation hub for Yiddish literature as well as a gorgeous cultural center with many interactive exhibits and plenty of art. Participants enjoyed a day of cultural and literary adventure, while sharing a wonderful experience with neighbors.

As "Medfield Reads" has unfurled, the community has proven how engaged they are with the book, its ideas, and each other. Many have stopped by my desk to tell me a little about their own stories such as the elderly Greek American man who was raised in a bilingual home, the teen who loved the book and shared it with his grandmother, and the Unitarian Minister who was raised by a Yiddish speaking father. So many patrons have expressed their gratitude for the quality of programming offered. Yet perhaps the most encouraging sign of success has been not that the community loves what we have offered but that they, in turn, have begun to suggest and implement their own programs, providing new entry points and new perspectives. MPL started the conversation but the community is continuing it in a fresh, fun, and meaningful way.

One Book/One Community: Our Partnership, Our Experience

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The town of Bridgewater, population approximately 26,000, has participated in a community read program since 2006. Our One Book/One Community (OBOC) partnership includes the Bridgewater Public Library (BPL), Bridgewater State University, Bridgewater-Raynham Regional School District, Friends of BPL, the Bridgewater Senior Center, Bridgewater Business Association, and the Bridgewater State University Bookstore.

The driving force behind our One Book/One Community partnership was the former director of library services at Bridge-

water-Raynham Regional High School, who has since retired. Her enthusiasm was contagious and everyone quickly got on board. Our motto, which is written on our promotional brochures, is: "A community that opens the same book together closes it in greater harmony."

The committee's first choice was Barbara Ehrenreich's best-selling nonfiction exposé, *Nickel and Dimed: On (Not) Getting by in America*. The program extended from mid-winter through May 2006 and culminated with an author visit that filled the university auditorium with a mix of high school students, college students, and townspeople. As a supplementary program, the public library sponsored an essay contest open to any town resident and/or student. Those entering the contest were asked to answer three questions: (1) What was the worst job you ever had?, (2) Why was it the worst?, and (3) What did you learn about yourself from this job? Prizes, which were donated by local business establishments, were award-

ed. The winners' essays were published in the local weekly newspaper and in our library newsletter. Several book clubs chose to discuss Ehrenreich's book. Art students from the high school had a display of their work at the public library (incorporating themes from the book.) It was a successful beginning.

The following year, the committee chose Jodi Picoult's *My Sister's Keeper*. Although the book is a work of fiction, it focused on a serious and controversial subject, genetic planning. The public library sponsored another essay contest, with prizes donated by local restaurants. The essayists were asked to answer the question: Do you own your own life, or does society? Again, book clubs discussed the book, and there was a special "lunch box discussion" held at the university library. A public showing of *Frankenstein*, followed by a discussion of medical ethics, was held on the university campus.

For spring 2011, we chose a nonfiction title with local interest: *Dark Tide: The Great*

Molasses Flood of 1919, by Steven Puleo. Our kickoff ("A Sweet Event") featured music, a display of antiques from the early 1900s, and a molasses cookie contest. We invited local dignitaries to judge the contest and awarded first, second, and third prizes. We had more entries than we expected, and the attendees were invited to enjoy anything not consumed by the judges. At the same event, we set up a display of household items that would have been used during the time period when the molas-

ses explosion took place. These items belonged to members of the committee who took responsibility for setting up the displays and answered questions from the curious children in the crowd.

Later on in the semester, the public library hosted a journalist/educator who spoke about media coverage of the molasses disaster and other early twentieth-century events. A third event, "Treasures of the Archives," featured a talk about immigration to Massachusetts in the late 1800s. A fourth event featured a college historian who spoke about "Boston 1919: Scandal, Epidemic and Prohibition." Our final event was a lecture by the author of *Dark Tide*, Stephen Puleo.

We are now in our seventh year of One Book/One Community. After a number of suggestions and a lot of discussion, our selection committee settled on Sandy Tolan's *The Lemon Tree: An Arab, a Jew, and the Heart of the Middle East* for fall 2012. This is nonfiction, focusing on the summer of 1967, and set in Israel. The author has been contacted and will be coming to Bridgewater in November.

Some books have been better received than others. The goal of the university and the local high school is to choose a title that fits into the academic curriculum.

Each semester we offer a variety of book discussion groups that meet in various locations, including the senior center, the university, and the public library. Interested readers are also encouraged to use the OBOC choice with their own personal book clubs, and many have done so enthusiastically. The public library purchases multiple copies of the chosen book when it is available in paperback, and will also purchase an audio version if available. The university also purchases multiple copies that are distributed throughout the town.

I have learned three important lessons from our OBOC partnership:

1. You can't please all of the people all of the time. A minority of readers will complain no matter what book is chosen.
2. Share the responsibility.
3. Be creative in interpreting your chosen book's theme. **PL**

Fulton County, Georgia ("County") Atlanta-Fulton Public Library System (AFPLS) is soliciting proposals from qualified vendors for the Opening Day Book Collections for Eight (8) New Branch Library Projects and One (1) Renovated/Expanded Library. This project includes the selection, purchase, cataloging, processing, storage, delivery and shelving of appropriate Opening Day Collections of books for new and expanded branches.

The due date is October 22, 2012 at 11:00 a.m. The proposal document can be downloaded from the Fulton County website, <http://fultoncountyga.gov> under "Bid Opportunities."



atlanta-fulton public library system