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Recommended Citation

18(4) AALL Spectrum 14 (2014)

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Fifteen Years and Growing Strong!

The annual AALL Children's Book Drive

By Stacy Etheredge

The 2013 AALL Annual Meeting in Seattle celebrated the 15th anniversary of one of the most unique and treasured events of our Association: the annual AALL Children's Book Drive. Over the past 15 years the book drive has raised tens of thousands of dollars for underprivileged children across the nation, and it shows no sign of stopping.

The Children's Book Drive is one of the flagship projects of the Social Responsibilities Special Interest Section (SR-SIS), which coordinates the drive every year. The SR-SIS's core mission is to address "issues of social change and social responsibility that are of concern to AALL members." The book drive, even though it is outside our Association's overall concern with law, exemplifies our dedication to the greater values of librarianship by focusing on the literacy problem in our country.

The reading achievement gap between more and less economically advantaged children is substantial, pervasive, and persistent, even with federal and state initiatives trying to close the gap. Both exposure to books and being read to promote a positive attitude toward reading and learning, which plays a key role in the development of children's literacy skills and their eventual success in school. Unfortunately, studies have shown that a majority of low-income families own no age-appropriate books for their children. Thus, one of the biggest obstacles to the development of literacy in children from economically disadvantaged families is a scarcity of books. A desire to combat this situation, even in a small way, is the guiding force behind the AALL Children's Book Drive.

Not-So-Humble Beginnings

The first book drive took place during the 1999 AALL Annual Meeting in Washington, D.C. The idea began with Carol Billings, now retired but a beloved member and former AALL president. She and her husband, Warren (another AALL stalwart), had attended several annual meetings of the British and Irish Association of Law Librarians (BIALL) and had learned that BIALL always held a raffle to raise money for a local charity in the conference city. Enthused, Billings

brought that idea back to AALL and, with the major support and hard work of then-AALL President Jim Heller and Karen Westwood, then chair of the SR-SIS, was finally able to get it off the ground in 1999. At that point, the decision was made to focus on raising money for public school libraries.

During the first two years, at the Washington, D.C., and Philadelphia Annual Meetings, the project was even more ambitious than it is today. The book drive was combined with AALL members (25 in the first year) volunteering in local school libraries and doing whatever was needed, whether it was weeding, shelving, reading to students in summer school, or teaching the basics of cataloging to nonlibrarian employees in charge of the libraries.



A graphic designed to promote the 2012 Boston book drive, "One if By Land, Two if Buy Book." The image was created by Alethea Jones.

Although that part of the project eventually proved too difficult to maintain, the sheer need of the schools and the genuine gratitude of the school libraries had a tremendous impact on the visiting librarians. Westwood remembers a friend stating, "My kids have more books under their beds than they had in that school library." It is this basic and overwhelming need for books that continues to fuel the Children's Book Drive.

Local Love

A unique aspect of the book drive is the idea of giving something back to the Annual Meeting's host city, a tradition that has been carried on ever since that first drive in 1999. Instead of just running a generic drive where the proceeds could be turned over to any organization, anywhere, at any time of the year—a commendable but slightly businesslike approach—the decision was made to tie the drive directly to the host city (and by extension, very often to the host state). This personalization of the Children's Book Drive to the local community gives it a distinctive touch and always resonates with AALL members.

In fact, the local tie-in has serendipitously benefitted the public relations machine for the book drive, as it lends itself nicely to creative and fun taglines for the event. Some examples of taglines from past drives include:

- A Capital Contribution (Washington, D.C., 1999)
- Twice as Responsible (Twin Cities, 2001)
- Bookless in Seattle (Seattle, 2003)
- Fiesta of Books! (San Antonio, 2005)
- Show Me the Books! (St. Louis, 2006)
- Uncle Sam Wants Your Books! (Washington, D.C., 2009)
- Give Me Liberty and Give Me Books (Philadelphia, 2011)
- It's Raining Books! (Seattle, 2013)

The 2012 Boston book drive theme, "One if By Land, Two if Buy Book," allowed for an extra twist when the SR-SIS announced that it would match a book for every book donated, a promotional move that was very well received.

And, whenever possible, artwork is also added to enhance the local theme. Sometimes this is just a simple image cobbled together, like the Uncle Sam "I Want You to Give Books!" graphic used for the 2009 Washington, D.C., drive, which can be seen on page 16. However, sometimes this can be a real piece of art, such as the delightful and very popular image used for the 2013 Seattle "It's Raining Books!" drive, which was painted and generously



This image, also created by Alethea Jones, promoted the Seattle 2013 "It's Raining Books!" drive.

donated by Alethea Jones, circulation services specialist at Harvard Law Library in Cambridge, Massachusetts.

Logistics

As one might imagine, running the drive requires coordination and dedication. After the conclusion of each year's Annual Meeting, an SR-SIS member volunteers to be the chair of the next year's book drive. Preference is given to finding a chair that is a resident of the next meeting's host city or state, as it helps to have someone on the scene that can pick the donee organization and coordinate local arrangements, including delivery of books. If that is not possible, the chair usually tries to find a co-chair who is a local resident, whether or not they are a member of the SR-SIS. The entire SR-SIS executive board is also always involved in supporting the work of the chair, as well as any other SIS member who wants to lend a hand.

The only requirement that the chair works under is that the chosen organization must serve a local population, though that does not mean it is restricted to just the host city. Very often a group will be chosen that serves children throughout a region of the state, if not the entire state. And though the book drive started out working with public school libraries, it quickly evolved into partnering with any type of organization that serves the reading needs of underprivileged children. This has included entities such as Read Boston, a city initiative that works to ensure that all Boston children are functioning readers by the end of third grade, and the Willamette Writers' Books for Kids Program, a group that collects and distributes books to low-income children throughout Oregon and southwestern Washington State.

Since the chair picks the donee organization, this choice can often be quite personal, which provides yet another nice touch to the book drive. For instance, I have been privileged to chair two drives. For the first one, at the 2009 Washington, D.C., meeting, as co-chair I chose a local elementary

I Want YOU



To Give BOOKS

The artwork used for the 2009 Washington, D.C., book drive

school in a struggling neighborhood where my oldest brother teaches; the donations that year stayed within one school and thus had a high impact on a very localized need. During the 2013 Seattle meeting, I chose an organization that was dear to my heart as I had volunteered with it while living in Seattle (I am a Washington native); this group, Page Ahead, sends books to children throughout Washington, serving my entire home state.

Just as the type of organizations served has evolved over the years, so have the logistics of executing the drive. In the early years, members were asked to donate books at drop-off locations in the convention areas, whether they brought the books from home or bought them on-site in the city. As time wore on, there was an additional option of mailing the books in advance to the book drive chair, which is why it was important to have a local connection. The chairs in those years really went the extra mile, sacrificing much time and effort in first receiving and then delivering the books to the donee organization.

But then 21st century technology came to the rescue with what has probably been the most effective fundraising tool of all, the use of an Amazon Wish List. Although the chair is responsible for creating and populating

the list, the donee organization is now able to specify exactly what books it would like to receive. Members who love sharing their own favorite children's books still like to bring physical books to the convention site (and more do than one might think), but most of the donations now come via the ease of the Wish List. And, of course, members continue to give cash, checks, and gift cards, often stopping the drive chair or other SR-SIS members in hallways to hand over whatever they may have in their wallet at the time.

Changing technology has also benefitted the Children's Book Drive in terms of publicity. What was once dependent on flyers and word of mouth soon gave way to emails and listservs. And now there is a dizzying array of social media options to utilize. As the world evolves, so does the book drive.

Continuing the Tradition

During the 15 years the Children's Book Drive has been operating, it has raised tens of thousands of dollars for school libraries and other nonprofit organizations thanks to the generosity of AALL members. The 2013 Seattle book drive alone raised more than \$3,000 in money and books. That, combined with the annual direct contribution from the SR-SIS, resulted in the Page Ahead organization receiving \$3,700 in donations. Even years into an economic downturn, a shared basic desire, if not a duty, among librarians to bring books to needy children across the country drives a tradition that continues to grow strong.

For a complete list of the SR-SIS Annual Children's Book Drives, please visit www.aallnet.org/sections/sr/projects. Stay tuned for information about the 16th annual Children's Book Drive in San Antonio! ■



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Memorials



AALL Spectrum has been advised of the death of **Harva Sheeler**.

Ms. Sheeler was a longtime member of AALL, the Private Law Libraries Special Interest Section, and the Law Librarians' Society of Washington, D.C. (LLSDC). She was the Washington office library services manager at Jones Day for 31 years and served as coordinator of the libraries for several years. As the firm opened new offices in the United States and throughout the world, Sheeler was instrumental in establishing library services in the new offices. Among her many accomplishments, she was a past president of LLSDC and received its Lifetime Award in 2011. She passed away November 16, 2013.

AALL Spectrum carries brief announcements of members' deaths in the "Memorials" column. Traditional memorials should be submitted to James Duggan at *Law Library Journal*, Tulane University Law Library, 6329 Freret St., New Orleans, LA 70118-6231 or emailed to duggan@tulane.edu.