



with Paulette Goodman, Joann Pompa, and Joan Arrowsmith

Spontaneous Combustion:

School Libraries Providing the Spark to Connect Teens, Books, Reading—and Even Writing!

For the last Library Connection column, media specialist Lisa Bowen from the Stapley Junior High library in Mesa, Arizona, described how her library is a vibrant, attractive hub of much school interest and activity. In the last few years, I have discovered many other libraries like Lisa's that are becoming a school focal point by directly involving teens and developing a variety of fun, enticing, and educational activities. In schools that have such libraries, teens discover a place to belong, a place to express themselves through reading and writing, a place to explore literature, and a place to encourage them to see that books and libraries are wonderful for research and entertainment alike.

In this issue, I am featuring three school libraries that have ignited the spark and have made promoting the library, sharing books and reading, and reaching out to their communities an adventure. One library is from a junior high, one from a middle school, and one from a senior high school. All three have connected teens with their libraries through some impressive programs and

activities that you might think about suggesting to your media specialist if you are a teacher, or implementing if you are a media specialist. Of course, you will also want tell any interested students about these ideas!

How Our Library Resource Center Became Center Stage

Paulette Goodman, Library Resource Center Director at Kennedy Junior High School in Naperville, Illinois, shared with me information about the inspiring things she has done through her school library media center:

"In creating a new library environment eighteen years ago, I knew that it needed to be interactive, allowing students to not only roam the stacks, but also to partake of a different menu – a menu of authors, storytellers, poets, musical groups, read-ins, contests and anything that kept them coming into the library and discovering its riches. Books are meant to crown a library's mantle, and through connecting them with the authors of those books, young adult readers

can develop a desire to continue the process of reading into their adult lives. So with that philosophy in mind as our library began, several years followed that were filled with a smattering of visiting authors. The number of these visits grew and grew, until we reached an average of about eight authors/poets/storytellers per school year, and I contract for additional presentations that are supplied by our local book vendor, Anderson's Bookstore in Naperville, Illinois.

"In preparation for each visit, teachers and students throughout the school read a copy of the author's work and plan to have their students come to the library for an author fest. The authors are often surprised by the seasoned questioners and the quality of the critical inquiries they receive. Teachers have also hopped on the bandwagon with three adult book discussions each year lead by me, complete with a catered lunch and sprinkled with lively discourse. Reading is our mantle, and we wear it proudly!

"Among our students, fantasy is the genre of choice, followed by adventure and science fiction.

Inspired by the author fests, student interest in these and other genres has reached such heights that a unique young authors group was formed, sporting the name 'Screaming Pens.' These young adults have committed themselves to writing now, and they each foresee a future that will include writing as its main focus, whether as an author, reporter or newspaper columnist.

"The shining jewel of each year's activities takes place during National Poetry Month in April with a program entitled, 'A Night at the Blue Iguana Café: A Poetry Blast!' Young adult poets seem to come out of the woodwork, and students, parents, siblings, grandparents, and even former students come to enjoy this glistening night of poetry, music and café desserts. It's a wonder to behold and leaves each participant with satisfied sighs.

"Library work is a passion for me, and it is exciting to see my efforts gain momentum through the years. Each book, author, reader, or performer leaves an indelible mark with memories lingering for years to come. They say I may never know what effect my library will have on the students in my school, but I have had some hints. Sometimes a former student meets me at a restaurant or train station and remembers something that was significant to him or her from my library program and its strong connection between reading and writing. It is then that I know that what is being done here goes beyond a moment's pleasure, leaving a taste for literature and a love for libraries that defies extinction."

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"Small but Mighty" Fosters Contagious Enthusiasm

Joan Arrowsmith, Teacher-Librarian at Summit Ridge Middle School in Littleton, Colorado, shared her perspectives on the LLAMA Book Club:

"This group was formed to meet a need I felt to have something similar to a teen advisory board at the public library. I was trying to do promotions throughout the year by myself, and not too successfully. The name LLAMA, League of Library and Media Advisors, was created by an assistant principal in response to my plea for help on a name for the club. I didn't want it to just be the Summit Ridge book club. It is listed as a school club in the document

that is handed out in the fall to all students. There are always lots of questions about LLAMA and what exactly its function is.

"I asked the club what they felt our mission and purpose was, and they said it was to 'be with people who like books as much as we do.' However, it goes beyond that as the members also reach out to other students in the school, as well as to the community. Events and promotions they have helped with include a book fair (it doubled my profits the first year they helped!), promoting National Library Week, and doing a used book sale. The leftover books were sent to the Hurricane Katrina area with a group of teachers who drove down to help during our spring break that year.

"Our young adults have helped me decide on prizes for contests and figured out what those contests should be, made posters promoting events throughout the school, and have even given up eating with their friends to collect money for Heifer International, an organization dedicated to eliminating world hunger. For this project, they raised enough spare change to buy four flocks of chickens! They also wanted to promote reading with younger students, so they arranged to go read to the kindergarten students at a nearby elementary school.

"For the past two years, they have been presenters at the Colorado Teen Literature Conference. They hear the special speakers, attend the programs offered, and participate in teen panels and discussions. All of this is done by a group of five! Sometimes there are only two or three students at our

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meetings. They are truly small, but mighty!!

“At our meetings, we share information about books that we’re reading or have just finished, promoting reading within the group. All the books can be different. This is not a book club where everyone reads the same book to discuss. They get enough of that in class. The book sharing is always the highlight of any meeting. Otherwise, we plan for whatever promotion or event is coming up. Additional ways we’ve learned about new books is to go to the public library or to a local bookstore for book talks about new and exciting titles.

“Advice the young adults and I have for others considering starting a group like ours includes:

- Pick a day when everyone can come. We meet on Fridays because that worked best for most of the kids.
- Meet weekly.
- Don’t just talk about books. Do other fun stuff like the Colorado Teen Literature Conference.
- Let the kids do as much as you are comfortable letting them do. I always try to let it be their club. In fact, I’ve tried to have them be the ones to run the meetings, which sometimes works. It helps to have some kind of agenda to follow. Usually the book sharing is the priority.

- Relax and have fun!

“I have thoroughly enjoyed sponsoring this club. I usually get some really awesome kids who join, and their enthusiasm is contagious. They have been a great help with so many things. I seem to always have a new group each year with maybe one or two repeaters, which has worked out just fine. It doesn’t get old for anyone that way. I highly recommend it.

“I asked the kids what their favorite thing about the club was, and without hesitation, one girl answered, ‘Making new friends.’”

Book Drives, T-shirts, and More: Friends of the Library at Corona del Sol High School

Joann Pompa, the Librarian at Corona del Sol High School in Tempe, Arizona, described the active and involved ten-member group in her library:

“I am co-sponsor of the club with Mrs. Gail Finney, who is our Information Specialist/Circulation Clerk. This is our second year as a club, and the teens are now officially student members of the Friends of the Library USA. The club is promoted in the school handbook and at orientation.

“The purpose of the CdS Friends of the Library Club is to promote our library programs as well as to perform community service projects. We meet every Monday afternoon for about one and one half hours working on ‘monthly themes’ and creating a warm, hospitable place to come and work or just ‘hang.’ Every student is welcome to join us, and each person’s dues of \$5 goes

toward the end-of-the-year banquet.

“We have six officers: President, Anne Osborne; Vice-President, Sarah Nagaratnam; Secretary, David Leitman; Treasurer, Federica Scarcella; Historian, Sarah Harvey; and Publicity Manager, Anthony Eftimeo. Anne had contacted the Thomas J. Pappas School for the Homeless of Tempe late last fall and asked if we could do anything to assist the staff and students, especially after a storm had devastated the library. The principal gave Anne a wish list of books, flashcards, and workbooks. To support the school, we sold candy and worked closely with Jamba Juice for our main fundraisers. We earned over \$1,200 for this project, and donated \$1,000 in Teaching Stuff and Changing Hands Bookstore gift certificates, \$500 from each business. We have also donated \$100 to our CdS National Honor Society chapter to help the Pappas School and visited a teaching supply store to purchase the requested materials for the school. Our goal next year is to try and raise \$1,500 for the Pappas School.

“This year, the club has also collected books in conjunction with the Student Council to help other needy children. Last year, we did a book drive for the Katrina victims, as well as collecting eye glasses for the Lion’s Club. Collecting the glasses for the Lion’s Club is an ongoing project.

“To promote reading among their peers, the teens develop monthly themes and do promotional activities for our school. Here are some examples:

- In the entrance lobby to our library, we have posted in cut-

out letters in the school colors of orange and yellow that say, 'One School . . . Many Readers!' The two halls that lead into the library have in large letters 'CdS' on one side and 'AZTECS' on the other and within these letters, we have pictures of students and faculty caught reading! It is a wonderful collage.

- The students have come up with fitting themes such as 'Take a Break! Read a Book!' which was just used in March when spring break occurred. Last year, in March 2006, we had, 'Reading is your lucky charm!'
- We promoted the 'ONE BOOK. ONE MONTH. ONE GOAL' program for April. The 2007 'One Book AZ' selection was *Going Back to Bisbee* by Richard Shelton. The club purchased several copies of the books for the faculty and students to read for this theme.
- Our T-shirt theme this year is, 'Reading is an International Affair.' On the back of the T-shirt we have the word 'READ' in the languages taught here at Corona del Sol, plus all the English Language Learner students' languages!
- The students help to promote books by using our display cases in the library and setting up books related to that monthly theme on carts.
- The students also make posters for the AZTYKES, our 3- to 4-year-olds who attend a day care here, for their weekly reading themes. Club members are excited about helping the little ones to develop an early passion for reading.

"Students who participate in

the club get special credit for their participation. They must put in 20 hours, 10 hours each semester, by attending weekly meetings and helping out in the library for our community service needs. We have an 'awards banquet' at the end of the school year at a local restaurant where Mrs. Finney and I hand out certificates and small tokens of appreciation. After earning hours with us, students may earn community service hours through National Honor Society projects.

"Each officer in the club has special duties that help make everything gel. The President runs our meetings and coordinates with the Pappas School for its teachers' needs. She helps out everywhere she can. Our Vice-President fills in for the President when needed and is a very talented artist. She helps with the displays and AZTYKE posters. The Secretary takes notes. He is the 'gopher' of the group, doing just about anything he can. The Treasurer collects our money and helps with the themes. The Historian takes pictures. She works with Mrs. Finney in keeping our bulletin boards up-to-date with interesting articles that highlight our school and/or students. She works on the AZTYKE posters and the lobby displays. The Publicity manager helps make the posters and/or flyers for our fundraisers. He also fills in wherever he can. The members are just fantastic! We are small, yet hard-working!

"The members of the CdS Friends of the Library Club were anxious to share some of their comments with me, too:

"It felt really heartwarming to help out children who don't have much at all. I want to encourage

students all over to join their Friends of the Library club, or to start one if they don't have one.'

"We have done many things both inside and outside the Corona community to give aid and to promote reading and literacy.'

"All the members are totally committed to Friends of the Library and contributed their hard work and talents. Of course, we had a lot of fun too! We watched Harry Potter one day after school and ate pizza!'

"This club promotes great ideas, fun, and a great creative environment. Even though I'm graduating this year, this club showed me so many things and I hope that future members will enjoy it as much as I did.'

"I feel I that I had a part in helping spread knowledge, because through our hard work we helped spread knowledge of our library . . . I know that we all have busy academic schedules, but we still dedicated our time to do something bigger than ourselves.'

"More people like to go to the library now. One of my friends actually told me how she liked the library once the place started to be decorated. It is changing from a deserted place to the focal point of the school. It makes me feel better that people are appreciating our work.'"

There you have it: Three interesting examples of school libraries with a wide variety of relevant and enjoyable events and activities, including lots of teen participation. These libraries connect students, books, reading, and writing in ways that leave a lasting impression on their schools and communities. When you hear

about students and libraries like these, you can certainly envision many lifelong readers, learners, and library users developing as a result!

Diane P. Tuccillo is the former Young Adult Coordinator at the City of Mesa Library in Arizona, is ALAN's Past-President, and is the author of Library Teen Advisory Groups: A VOYA Guide

(Scarecrow, 2005). She also does other writing projects, presents workshops, and teaches virtually at the college level.

Paulette Goodman is the Library Resource Center Director at Kennedy Junior High School, Naperville No. 203 Community Unit School District, in Naperville, Illinois.

Joan Arrowsmith is a Teacher-Librarian at Summit Ridge Middle School, Jefferson County Public Schools, in Littleton, Colorado.

Joann Pompa is a Teacher-Librarian at Corona del Sol High School in Tempe, Arizona.