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BEHIND THE BOOKS

Friends of the Library stage massive sorting, shelving operation

BY LUCIANO MARANO

Kitsap News Group

Icons and unknowns. Bestsellers and sleeper hits. Obvious scores and overlooked gems.

From far and wide they come, in boxes and bags from estate and rummage sales, from anonymous donors looking to pass on prized treasures, to the Bainbridge Public Library to be sorted, stacked, shelved and sold thrice monthly by an orchestrated army of volunteers.

And there is more than just books to discover at the regular Friends of the Library Book Sale, too. CDs, DVDs, and more magazines than a dozen dentist's waiting rooms can hold await shoppers brave enough to search the shelves.

But then again the hunt is half the fun.

And nobody knows that better than the Friends of the Library volunteers, those behind the sale, who take donations from drop-off to checkout.

"It's like home; it's a very comfortable place to work and we're all happy to help the library make money," said Lois Reitz, president of the board of the Bainbridge Island Friends of the Library.

"The [volunteers] who come in have just become really good friends. They continue that friendship outside."

B.I. Friends of the Library boasts about 75 members, Reitz said, and many can be found sorting donations at least once a week — if not more.

"We sort Monday, Wednesday and Friday, from 1 to 2 [p.m.] or longer if need be," she said. "They don't all come in all three days. Monday is a very heavy day, so we've got the most sorters on that day, because we usually have a lot of donations over the weekend and the sorters will take a book out of [the] pile, look at it and say, 'All right, what category is this?'"

Each category has a volunteer manager, and they

work amongst themselves to decide where a particular tome should be placed when a book might possibly fit more than one category (History and Biography, say). Others specifically sort

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magazines, and some act as cashiers on sale days.

Reitz has no idea how many volunteer hours go into each sale, let alone how many books on average get sorted — "No idea," she laughed — or even how many customers show up to browse (though the sales' robust attendance is common knowledge round the Rock), but said abundant donations and thus jobs to be done are never in short supply.

"We see great donations because Bainbridge Island is a great community," she said. "It's a reading community and it's a giving community."

"Sometimes the donations are so large we say you can drop half of them off, you can't drop all of them off," she added. "We're real careful also on the day before a sale, because when we set up for a sale we have to get rid of all those [plastic containers], all the empty boxes have to be disposed of, all the carts have to go away, and we have the tables set up with the high price items for the sale."

Books a volunteer suspect may be worth more than the usual sale price tag are set aside upon sorting and placed at a special workstation in the back to be investigated more thoroughly. Rare volumes that fetch hefty returns — Friends of the Library once received a book worth \$800 — are typically sold online.

"If we can't sell it here ... we then check online to see if a second-party seller

will sell it for us," Reitz said. "The books that come in are fabulous. We have had just amazing donations."

Daphne Stewart, a volunteer with about 10 years experience at the book sales

who specializes in hardback fiction and also sorts the books that are always for sale upstairs and in the foyer, agreed.

"It's really quite unbelievable that we get both the amount and quality of books that we get," she said.

Tastes do change and a wealth of quality donations might

mean a run on a certain section, but some things are perennially popular.

"I would say trade fiction, obviously, travel, cooking; I think history does OK down here but does really well upstairs; sort of a different crowd," Stewart said. "Self help, religion do well down here and I can't sell them upstairs, they don't do very well. After a while you learn what's selling up there and what's not."

The money spent at the book sale goes back into the library in a number of ways, Reitz said, some obvious and some not.

"Our money goes into a foundation, an endowment, that helps the library," she said. "All of our money goes to help the library. We pay for the children's reading program ... we pay for the aquarium, we pay for some of the magazine subscriptions."

Judging by the sale's usual attendance, those are bound to be some well-fed fish.

"They line up," Reitz said. "People are lined up before the doors are opened. We've got a door [downstairs] and a door upstairs, so we've got to make sure the doors are coordinated, because otherwise the people down here will see the others and say, 'Hey, wait a second!'"

"You don't want to get in the way of some of those people," Stewart agreed.

The Friends of the Library book sale occurs three times each month: 10 a.m. on the second Saturday, 10 a.m. on the fourth Tuesday, and at 1 p.m. one Thursday (often



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Lois Reitz, president of the board of the Bainbridge Island Friends of the Library (left) talks with longtime volunteer Daphne Stewart during a sorting/shelving session earlier this week in preparation for an upcoming book sale at the Bainbridge Public Library.

on the first Thursday, but it is sometimes moved to later to better space out the book sales). Check the calendar at www.bifriends.org for a

complete schedule.

The next three sales are: 10 a.m. Saturday, June 8; 1 p.m. Thursday, June 13; and 10 a.m. Tuesday, June 25.

Email books4all@bifriends.org with questions regarding potential volunteer opportunities and/or donations instructions.