



Booklovers'

Bonanza

Friends of the Library support the public library (and provide a treasure hunt for bibliophiles)



They begin lining up long before the doors open at noon. Excitement builds as the hour draws near. Those waiting to rush inside aren't Swifties ready to rock nor shoppers preparing to storm a mall on Black Friday. They are booklovers wanting to be the first to get a look at the reads on offer at a Bainbridge Island Friends of the Library book sale.

"I always step way out of the doorway when I first open the door because I might be trampled to death if I don't," joked FOL volunteer and board president Carol Schuyler.

BY GEORGE SOLTES
PHOTOS BY GEORGE SOLTES

Why are people so anxious to hit the shelves?

"We've got a great book selection, they're in superb shape and they're cheap," explained volunteer Charlie Browne.

The sales, which average three per month, are held on Sundays or Thursdays from 12 to 4 p.m. at the Bainbridge Public Library. The FOL book rooms, tucked away downstairs, can be accessed from the main library during its operating hours or via the lower-level children's library entrance for Sunday sales.

Most of the books are in near-new condition, usually selling for \$1 to \$2.

Magazines, CDs and DVDs are also offered at a fraction of their original prices.

Schuyler said that beyond the obvious bargain aspect, people are drawn to the community of readers who gather for the sales. "People are really bonding," she said. "We have a lot of regular people who come in a couple of times a month just because something new might be there." Browne added that the thrill of the search is also part of the fun. "It's like a treasure hunt."

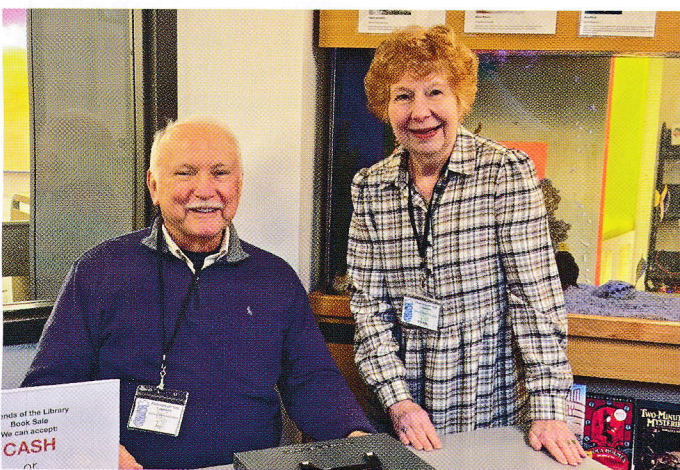
Schuyler spent her entire adult life around libraries. After a brief flirtation with becoming a schoolteacher ("I love children but didn't know that I wanted to teach them five days a week."), she earned a master's degree in library science at UW, then worked as a children's librarian at the Seattle Public Library. After moving to Bainbridge to raise her own young children, she filled a number of roles in the Kitsap Regional Library system, finally retiring nine years ago as director of Support Services.

It only took six months of retirement for her to dive right back in. She began volunteering with the Friends of the Library (customarily referred to by its members as simply "the Friends") and, before she knew it, was serving on the FOL board as well as the board of the Bainbridge Public Library.

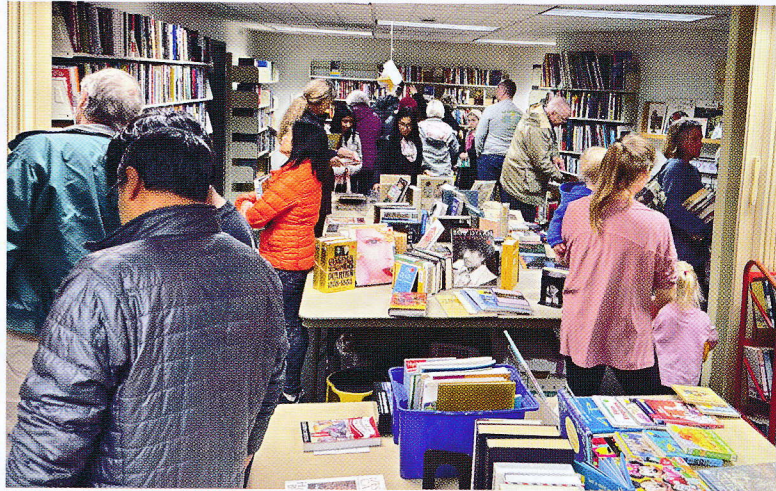
The Friends have existed for more than 100 years, as long as there have been libraries on the island. Browne, who among many other duties is the organization's archivist, explained that funds were originally raised through "Silver Teas," gatherings in private homes where supporters listened to speakers and collected donations, but that these days the FOL functions solely as a used book business.

All the books and other items sold are donated by the community. Most are dropped off at the library, although pick-up is offered for large collections. Browne is continually amazed by the quality of donations that come through the door. "We are very fortunate to live in a generous, literate community that takes good care of their books."

Donors can be sure that whatever they give will benefit the library. "Anything that's donated, unless it's dirty or moldy or completely torn up, gets used," said Schuyler.



FOL volunteers Jon Davies and Carol Schuyler



In addition to the in-person book sales, valuable items are sold online, while those of lower quality are sold to vendors who sell or recycle them. For those wanting a curated experience, the Buy a Bag of Books program offers a collection from any genre at \$5 a bag.

The 65 FOL volunteers handle around 200,000 books a year. Browne stated that the nonprofit brought in nearly \$75,000 from book sales in 2023, an all-time record, as well collecting more than \$20,000 in direct donations. All of it was funneled back into the library, supporting building and grounds maintenance, staff needs, summer learning programs, adult education and, most famously, the children's aquarium. (Next time you stop by, say hello to the new candy cane squirelfish).

For teacher Denise Briggs Potter, donating to the Friends is an easy choice. "The library has played a fundamental role in my family's life—when my children were little and learning to read, when they grew into young adults and needed a quiet, safe place to do homework or research, and now, for me, when I help students in math," she said. "The Friends support staff, resources, and the building. What a great resource. We are a lucky community!"



Learn more at bifriends.org