

Some Book Sales Adapt in Time of Covid

By: Marge Ruschau

Three library Friends groups shared how they have been holding book sales during the pandemic at a Nov. 14 virtual fall conference that attracted about 60 people.

Each used a different method -- shopping for patrons using wish lists, holding mini sales rather than a big sale and selling timed-entry tickets for a sale in a large open part of the library.

Friends of the Westport Library appeared to bring in the largest amount in their sale -- \$2,500 -- by selling \$50 tickets for the first day of the sale. Jocelyn Barandiaran of Westport said they got the idea from other Friends groups who used to charge for advance entry to sales. They used the website Eventbrite to coordinate ticket sales.

Westport's sale was held on three days over Labor Day weekend, when the library was closed. Their advantage was the library has a two-story vaulted ceiling with great air circulation, Barandiaran said. Usually her group holds an outdoor summer sale.

Volunteers had to be told not to wander through the tables straightening books; this would minimize contact with the public.

"We were ultra conscious of the need for hygiene," she said.

Everyone's temperature and contact information was taken before entering. Barandiaran said she worried unnecessarily for two weeks afterwards that they would have to contact people because of a coronavirus outbreak.

Once 25 people entered -- the limited number for Day 1 -- they had an hour and 50 minutes to shop. Then the building was emptied before the next 25 were admitted. People liked that they didn't have to stand in line as they had in previous years.

Payment for books was supposed to be by credit card or exact change, Barandiaran said, but volunteers ignored that and made change anyway. Customers had to bring their own bags.

Danbury Friends have brought in about \$500 at each mini sale for a total of \$1,500. These took the place of their usual big sale.

"Dealers are really your friends at this point," said Karen Chambrovich of their Friends group. They were the big spenders. She suggested Friends groups share the names of dealers with other groups so that they could be notified of sales.

Danbury is also letting dealers and groups from town shop their sorting room. And they are considering offering free children's books in the area where free lunches are given to students.

One of the most important things Danbury did was to have the city's official hygiene rules posted so that customers and volunteers knew what they were. No one complained about the rules, Chambrovich said.

Berlin-Peck tried a completely different method, said Debbie Misiaszek of their Friends group. Potential customers email their wish lists and she shops for them. The town allowed them to have two dealers come in to buy books.

Berlin hasn't been too financially successful because of trying to coordinate with potential customers. However, it did help publicize the Friends, she said.

Also, they haven't been too successful in publicizing their plan. They are considering selling children's grab bags, Misiaszek said.

All the groups had a problem getting enough volunteers at this time. They also charged the same prices they normally do.

Getting rid of leftover books after a sale hasn't gotten any easier. These groups:

- Give them to a Connecticut prisons group
- Give them to Discover Books
- Save the best for a future sale

Danbury and Westport are still accepting donated books for now but Berlin is not.

"It's been a very trying time for all of you as we move through this pandemic," said Frank Ridley, FOCL president.