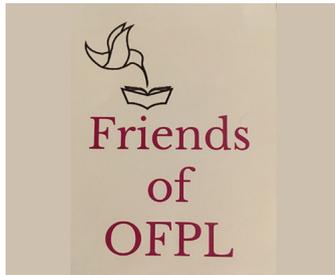


Read This: Library supporters invited to team up

Written by By Holly J. Wagner Sun Correspondent
Friday, 04 March 2022 04:05



Calling all bookworms! The Octavia Fellin Public Library wants *you*.

While you've been hunkered down enduring a pandemic, a core group of library lovers has been working behind the scenes to start the Friends of OFPL group, and everyone is invited to join.

The founding group had the supremely bad luck of starting their efforts in January 2020, otherwise known as the before-times. Then, of course, COVID-19 swept the globe and blew a lot of people's plans back.

Unable to convene meetings and do recruiting in person, the group set to work registering as a nonprofit, writing bylaws and doing the dry, administrative groundwork to set up the Friends of OFPL. By last year they were able to take over the library book sale, which is slated to become an annual event after years of a more hit-and-miss schedule.

"The library had tons of discarded and donated books that they wanted to move. In October we had a book sale at the events center downtown. It was very well attended. We sold lots of books," founding member and president Jo Ann Benenati said. "In Gallup there's not a lot of places to buy books."

They signed up about 40 new members and planned to have a membership meeting after the sale, but people were too tired and the scene too chaotic, so the first general membership meeting will be in April or May this year.

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It is likely to be a hybrid meeting, so those who are unable to travel or uncomfortable in indoor meetings can still attend.

While the library offers many programs and services to the community, it has city budget constraints and limitations on what donations it may accept. A nonprofit is able to do fundraising and bring in programs, materials and equipment that might fall outside the municipal charge, Library Director Tammi Moe said.

“Them having the 501c3 status lets you have access to grants and other funding mechanisms that we would not otherwise have,” she said. “They fill the gaps, too, when we don’t have enough staff positions within the library.”

A nonprofit support group can also do events that might not pass muster with government agencies.

“They could do a wine tasting or pub quiz night that we could not do as a government entity,” Moe said. “We were going to do a pub quiz a few years ago but the city shut it down” because there was a statue of Dionysus in a promotional picture and some city officials thought that was too much pub and not enough quiz.

The minimum involvement for Friends of OFPL members is a \$5 membership fee per person.

From there, volunteer opportunities are wide open: help with organizing, outreach and fundraising; working on the annual book sale and other events; support work at the library; serving on yet-to-be formed committees, and soon, when membership grows a little, appointing committees and electing a new board.

The group could especially use a few folks with bookkeeping, grant writing and tech skills.

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“We might need to revisit the bylaws because we may have been too ambitious. Until we get some participation, we can’t really have committees,” Benenati said. “We need to have a membership meeting, get our board elected and functioning.”

The existing board is the founding group, mainly because they needed officer names to put on the articles of incorporation forms, Benenati said, adding, “I’m really hesitant to call myself the president of this group, because it’s just a label that I’ve been assigned.”

Current members are Moe, attorney Bob Rosebrough, college English professor Keli Malm, and retired educators Benenati and John Lewis Taylor. Former Children’s Library director Anne Price moved out of state last October, so her seat will go to another library employee (the bylaws specify two library employee board members).

Friends of OFPL also hopes to field a community survey later this year to learn what programs and services are most valued in the community and what new programs have enough interest for pursuit.

“I think the library is the Number One quality of life program in the city,” Benenati said. “A lot of people like myself don’t have internet at home. When I can’t do something on my phone, I go to the library.”

Book lovers may join Friends of OFPL by filling out a form in a pamphlet at the main counter of the library and paying \$5 there, or on the OFPL website. To do that, go to <https://ofpl.online/partners-of-ofpl/#friends>, scroll down to Friends of OFPL, and click the Donate button to enter PayPal or bank card information for the \$5 membership fee.

It’s important to used the button under Friends of OFPL to be sure the donation goes to the Friends, not the city’s general account.

For questions or to inquire about serving on the board of directors, contact the group at friendsofopl@gmail.com.

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