

SOME SUGGESTIONS FOR PROMOTING YOUR SYNAGOGUE, CENTER OR SCHOOL LIBRARY

Elizabeth F. Stabler

Description: How do I decide what materials to purchase for the library? How can I get more people to visit my library? The second session of the Freshman Seminar II session will focus on developing an adult collection as well as programs and outreach activities that will bring adults into your library. Attendance at the 2002 Freshman Seminar is not required. Participants in the Freshman Seminar II are encouraged to attend all 4 sessions on Monday, but everyone is welcome to attend individual sessions.

Elizabeth F. Stabler (Liza) is the librarian at Congregation Emanu-El of the City of New York. As the full time solo librarian, her duties include acquisitions, cataloging, circulation, reference, managing volunteers, publicity, programming, story hours for toddlers, and facilitating adult book discussions. Previously Liza worked at the 92nd Street Y, where in addition to her library responsibilities, she initiated their book discussion group program and launched the Summer Camp Reading Club. Liza graduated with an A.B. in anthropology from Bryn Mawr College and received her M.S. from Columbia University's School of Library Service with honors.

We Jews may be the people of the book but I have learned that we are definitely not the people of the Temple Bulletin. The sad truth is, people just do not read what you want them too. For example, at Congregation Emanu-El, where I work, we have had a significant library for over 100 years. A few years ago the library's rededication in a beautiful, new and renovated space was promoted and publicized in every way possible. Yet, I cannot tell you how many members still say they never knew we existed.

A library is a lovely, quiet place to work. You will find that your patrons come there to hide out and to find a peaceful place to work. However, the librarian should not treat the library as her refuge or hiding place.

How do we market our libraries? First, realize that your library is an integral part of a number of ever-widening circles, beginning with the institution/community which houses and supports the library, such as a school, community center or synagogue. The library may also participate in the local Jewish and secular community. In addition, you are also connected to the professional library and Judaica library world. Make yourself part of all of these networks.

Your Institution

You are the library's most important resource. You are always its star advocate and representative. Do not worry, this does not entail publicizing yourself.

§ You will be marketing the library as a dependable source of information and resources. And remember, you will be in charge of informing and reminding people how the library can be useful to them -- continuously. Tell the rabbis, teachers, department heads etc., when you get in material that you think might interest or be useful to them.

§ Attend all staff and faculty meetings. Make certain you meet with all school division heads, department heads and the principal of the Hebrew School. Do so every year -- they will get used to you, especially when they learn that you are trying to help them. For example, if your institution has an adult education division, you can suggest a tour of the library for the faculty or an open house for the students. Offer to put books on reserve for the courses. Attend the first faculty meeting of the year of any education division and bring along a cart of the library's new treasures. If there is a guest lecturer program, meet early in the year with the programming person to find out who is speaking and make sure the library has the relevant books and that they are displayed.

- \$ Being out there among your colleagues ensures that the library reflects real needs and is not operating in a vacuum
- \$ Make sure that the library appears in the newsletter/bulletin of the institution as often as possible. Submit new books lists, short articles about special subjects or parts of the collection such as the cookbooks, “new historians”, holiday books for children, etc. Create bibliographies to distribute on relevant topics and seasonal events. Distribute bookmarks with library hours in every new member mailing – and whenever possible. If there are library programs, have a camera handy and submit the pictures with a small blurb to the newsletter editor. In my experience, the editors are always looking for fillers.
- \$ Inquire if there are bulletin boards or display cases for library related material such as new books, holiday-related items, special events. Have the graphics people make bookmarks, posters and flyers or do it yourself. This is very budget-dependent but do not minimize its importance.
- \$ Can you develop a friends of the library group? They take a lot of your time but they are the library’s best advocates.
- \$ Does the Board have a Library Committee? Make sure you get to know the chair and members of the committee very well. Keep them informed about what is happening in the library. These are the people to whom you not only should but must toot your horn.
- \$ Whenever you are professionally active outside your institution, tell your supervisor and all the library’s supporters, such as a Friends group or Board member.
- \$ Report on what you have learned at workshops, conferences you have attended.
- \$ Show them any articles you have written, flyers or programs with your name on it.
- \$ Volunteers play an important part in synagogue, center and some school libraries. It is very important that their volunteering experience is positive. Although they also take a lot of work, volunteers are major ambassadors for the library within the community.
- \$ Say thank you -- to donors even if the books are moldy (just make sure your written policy covers their appropriate disposal) -- to volunteers; we have a thank you reception in June every year which is getting to be quite the place to be seen. Photographs of the event appear in the temple bulletin.
- \$ Make sure that the library is as tidy and inviting as you can make it. This makes a huge difference; it tells patrons the space is theirs, not just the librarian’s private place. Have adequate signage. Above all, make the library experience something all age groups will find pleasant and will want to revisit.
- \$ Remember that how you personally deal with people has a real and lasting impact.
- \$ Being pleasant and friendly never means having to take abuse. That is not appropriate, ever. Make certain that your administration is behind you and that you understand any policies and methods for dealing with difficult patrons.
- \$ Just a reminder of what you already know. How you phrase things matters in how patrons experience and remember the library. Instead of a bald “no” at the beginning of a sentence, try “we cannot do *that* but what about *this*? Instead of “we do not/cannot do that”, try, “let’s see if there’s something we can do?” Instead of “I do not know”, use “let me see if I can find out.”
- \$ Have the friendliest, most tactful staff/volunteers at the front desk. If you have a grouchy volunteer or employee, keep him/her in the backroom, away from patrons, if possible.
- \$ Get the library accredited by AJL. When the senior rabbi receives the letter from the Accreditation Committee it makes a huge impact. Frame the certificate and display it prominently.
- \$ When you do programming, make certain it meets the interests and needs of your institution. For example, do not schedule story time for two year olds to conflict with the two year old program at the nursery school. If your median age is 60, new trendy, cutting edge authors may not draw as many people as an author’s memoir about growing up in the Depression. The aim is to bring the most people into the library.
- \$ Does your institution have a web page? Is the library’s page up-to-date and exciting? If possible, get the library catalog on the web.

Larger community

- \$ In the larger community, get to know the person who does the book reviews for the local Jewish paper. Everyone loves a library so the reviewer may be open to visiting. Besides, journalists are often grateful to

have a librarian to call on. They may even publish a list of your library's new books.

- § If your library programs are open to the public, try to get them listed in the paper's upcoming events section
- § Some local paper will publish the news releases about Sydney Taylor Awards, your attendance at the Convention, a local AJL chapter event, etc.
- § If there are local Jewish authors, and if your institution permits, position your library as a resource for them. Are these authors appropriate for a library program?
- § Learn what your community's major concerns are and try to be responsive. For example, there may be a local campaign to make people aware of domestic violence. Network with the social service agencies involved and see what you can do. Is there an anniversary coming up that you should be aware of?

Professional Networking

- § The importance of joining (or forming) a local chapter of AJL cannot be underplayed. It may seem like time away from the job for full time librarians or extra time for part-timers. You will not only learn a tremendous amount, but you will also be spreading the word about your library
- § Is there a local BJE which you can be a member of?
- § Does your institution participate in CAJE?
- § Are there other local organizations, such as a school librarians' network which would be relevant?

Marketing your library does not need to cost very much more than your time and attention. It can be summed up as Be Visible, Be Invaluable, be Integral.

Some Resources

Your local public library will have or can get for you through interlibrary loan, any number of books about publicizing or marketing your library. Unfortunately, most are intended for special or public libraries. However, you will be able to glean some useful information. In addition, *American Libraries* and *Library Journal*, also available at your public library if you don't subscribe, often feature articles on marketing and promoting your library. Two short articles which you may find helpful:

- < "The secret of library marketing: make yourself indispensable" by Marylaine Block *American Library*, September 2001.
- < "Marketing the worth of your library" by Rivkah K. Sass *Library Journal*, 6/15/02

Elizabeth F. Stabler
Librarian
Ivan M. Stettenheim Library
Congregation Emanu-El of the City of New York
establer@emanuelnyc.org