



Friends of the Marion Public Library: A Brief History

The Friends of the Marion Public Library is a citizen volunteer organization that promotes the use of the library and provides financial assistance for various purchases and programs.

Friends of Marion Carnegie Library (EIN 42-1335663, Iowa Business #131048) was organized in January 1989. One of the group's first actions was to gather 600 signatures on a petition for a library levy. The Friends of the Library Foundation was formed in 1995 to help raise funds for large projects and programs, including an endowment for the annual children's summer reading program. The Foundation operated as a committee of the Friends group until 2021, at which time (during the capital campaign for a new building) the Foundation worked to get its own 501(C)3 authorization for more efficient fundraising.

The Friends group also raises money with book sales, and when the 1095 6th Avenue library was built in 1996, Friends were given permanent space for a bookstore which opened November 1, 1996. The book sales and bookstore are run completely by volunteers. The Friends and Foundation have helped the Marion Public Library purchase materials for the collection, donated artwork to display, purchased land for extra parking, and much more through the years.

The Friends' main goal is supporting the Marion Public Library in its service to the people of Marion and the greater Metro area through the library's partnership with the Metro Library Network. Marion has approximately 35,000 residents who make up approximately 55% of total patrons served. Nearly 30% of Marion's population is under age 18.

The Friends of the Marion Public Library provide a programming budget for the library that allows the library to bring in presenters and speakers appealing to a broad spectrum of interests. A few examples of programs they have funded include: Maria Peth, Angel Decoder; a Winter Birding program offered by the Indian Creek Nature Center; a Backyard Chicken certification course and a Geocaching program, both offered by the Nature Center; and a program on UFOs of the Midwest, presented by researcher Terry Fiske.

In addition to subsidizing library programming, the Friends group presents several programs each year, including an annual author dinner (now discontinued) and a number of speakers such as Pat Klopfenstein, a local historian; Lance Mack, an Abraham Lincoln impersonator, and speakers from Humanities Iowa.

The Friends group continues to operate its popular and successful bookstore in the library's lobby, and holds two large book sales of used books and media each year in the spring and fall. These are the group's main sources of income. (At this writing, the 1095 6th Avenue building has been closed due to storm damage and consequently the bookstore will not be open until the new building, currently under construction, is completed; semi-monthly book sales are held in the building's lobby.)

The Friends support the library by providing funding for the Novelist online readers' advisory service and for the library's movie licenses. They purchase larger ticket items that aren't always supported by the

library's budget, and occasionally supplement the library's materials budget. The Friends group provides the Home Book Program for homebound patrons and is a local affiliate for the Dolly Parton Imagination Library.

The Friends has approximately 110 volunteers who help with operating the Friends' bookstore, organizing book sales, serve on the Friends Board, and facilitate various Friends events.

--compiled January 2015; updated December 2020