



## **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 the Marion Public Library (EIN 42-1335663, Iowa Business #131048) was organized in January 1989 as Friends of Marion Carnegie Library. 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 has always raised money with book sales, and when the 1095 6<sup>th</sup> Avenue library was built in 1996, Friends were given permanent space for a bookstore which opened November 1, 1996. The book sales and bookstore have always been 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 41,000 residents who make up approximately 55% of total patrons served. Nearly 28% of Marion's population is under age 18.

Over the years, Friends of the Marion Public Library has provided a programming budget for the library that has allowed 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, in the past the Friends group often presented several programs each year, including an annual author dinner and several speakers such as Pat Klopfenstein, a local historian; Lance Mack, an Abraham Lincoln impressionist, and speakers from Humanities Iowa. Friends now supports programming indirectly through funds raised for the library.

The Friends group continues to operate its popular and successful bookstore in the library's lobby (now in the new building as of 2022!) and holds larger book sales of used books and puzzles periodically each year. These are the group's main sources of income.

Friends has supported the library by providing funding for the Novelist online readers' advisory service and for the library's movie licenses. They fund larger ticket items that aren't always supported by the library's budget (e.g., a website upgrade, the exterior wrap for the bookmobile which was introduced in 2024), and occasionally supplements the library's materials budget. The Friends group subsidizes the

Home Book Program for homebound patrons and is a local affiliate for the Dolly Parton Imagination Library (in collaborative partnership with the Marion Library Foundation and the Marion Library staff).

Friends has approximately 260 members, many of whom volunteer to help with operating the Friends' bookstore, organizing book sales, serving on the Friends' Board, and facilitating various Friends' events.

--originally compiled January 2015; updated December 2020, July 2022, November 2025