

Book Sale Fresh Look Committee
Report to the Board – August 11, 2010

INTRODUCTION

Committee Objectives

The Fresh Look Committee was formed last spring with two objectives:

- Assess viability of continuing for the next 50 years
- Brainstorm ideas for improvement in all areas:
 1. What else can the branch do to continue or increase our level of fundraising?
 2. What are other Branches doing?
 3. If future Book Sale proceeds decrease, what other fundraising alternatives might supplement book sale revenues?
 4. How can we improve the Book Sale?
 - a. Operations (sale location, collection, storage, pricing)
 - b. Marketing and Promotion (look at both old and new technologies)

Committee

Chair: Jane Palmer

Members: Sue Balk, Vivian Bogdonoff, Bonnie Gahris, Linda Johansen, Mary Landeros, Lindy Pond, Pamela Starr, Kim Thacker, Cindy Trennert-Lukens

Committee membership was by invitation. Seventeen members were invited and 10 accepted. The group included two past Book Sale Chairs, the current EF chair, one past Treasurer. Make-up of the committee:

- Two past Book Sale Chair
- Current EF Chair
- One past and one current Branch Treasurer
- At least 5 members had business and marketing experience
- One member had significant experience in another AAUW branch
- About two-thirds of the committee had hands-on fundraising experience outside of AAUW
- The committee was about evenly split between newer members (i.e., Fresh Look) and long-time members

The committee accomplished its objectives through three meetings.

- Meeting #1 -- The group agreed upon the committee's objectives and did some initial brainstorming on "good/bad" about the current Book Sale (**Appendix A**) and other fundraising ideas. Each committee member agreed to research at least one fundraising idea. All members were asked to be very observant while working the book sale and chat with customers, if possible.
- Meeting #2 – The second meeting focused on the research done on the fundraising ideas. The committee also added to their summary of "good/bad" about the Book Sale.
- Meeting #3 – The third meeting further narrowed viable fundraising ideas and put together a list of some specific recommendations for the future of the Branch Used Book Sale

REPORT

Can The Book Sale Continue Its Current Level Of Profitability?

The biggest threat to the future of the book sale may be the emergence of E-books. Committee members believe that we may only have a five-year window to resell books at our current level of profitability.

- Sales of e-readers like Kindle and other more powerful devices like iPad are steadily increasing, especially among ages 25 to 50.
- E-reader prices are expected to continue to drop. According to a recent WSJ article, when the price of a reader reaches \$99, sales will spike. That is also the predicted price point at which families will consider buying a second (or third) reader for family use.
- Colleges are making textbooks and classroom supplemental readings available for download by students.
- E-readers weigh less than a hardcover book, are convenient for travelers and commuters, have backlighting for reading in bed and fonts are adjustable.
- Some books can be downloaded for less than \$10. In many cases, downloads cost less than the cost of a “real book”.

Committee members like most Branch members are lovers of “real books”. At least two committee members own an e-reader but continue to buy new and used books. They pointed out that you can’t pass on a down-loaded book to a friend without loaning the e-reader too. This means a market will continue to exist for “real books” but it may be smaller than it is today. Publishing companies are also dealing with these issues.

Other issues that may affect the profitability of future book sales:

- Reselling used books through a once a year Book Sale is very labor-intensive. We have been able to continue a successful Book Sale for nearly 50 years because of strong Branch leadership and many members willing to donate numerous hours toward collecting, sorting, staffing and staffing the sale
- We are currently drawing our membership from women of ages 50 to 80. This age group may not be the best group for dealing with some of the back-breaking work involved in the sale.
- We are seeing more competition for book donations
 - Other non-profit groups hold sales such as, public libraries, schools & churches
 - Companies have emerged who collect books for resale and pulping, such as, Thrift Recycling Management, the company that collects book donations through blue bins placed at grocery stores and other high traffic locations
 - Individuals who may in the past have donated books now find it easy to resell their books on Amazon or eBay

Despite all these issues, the Branch’s most recent book sale raised more money than any other in the last ten years. We think the success of the 2010 sale was due to an excellent overall publicity effort, several large donations of excellent books and the return of the fourth sale day. Net profitability increased from the donation of warehouse space for sorting and storage. Nonetheless, such success is unlikely to continue indefinitely for all the reasons listed above.

First Meeting

Committee members generally agreed that although Book Sale can continue as main fundraiser for next few years, it would be prudent to investigate other options, keeping in mind the following parameters.

- Start small – test ideas before committee to major alternative fundraiser.

- Brand appeal – Any alternative fundraiser must somehow tie in with AAUW mission and Branch personalities.
- Fun quotient – Any alternative fundraiser must be fun for volunteers so that “many hands can make light work”.

During the second half of the first meeting, the committee came up with a list of possible alternative fundraisers. Some would attempt to raise funds from community participation while others would raise funds from membership participation.

In no special order, the list included the following suggestions:

- Casino Night (with Silent Auction)
- Film Festival
- Membership Fundraisers
 - Mystery Night (Solicit volunteers to play character roles. Members and/or their teenage offspring are welcome as characters).
 - Progressive Dinner
 - Board Games (or Bean Bag Toss) Night
 - Old Treasures’ Sale
 - Services Auction
- Supplement Book Sale by selling books on-line
- Small-town Ice Cream Social (alternate Wheaton and Glen Ellyn locations)
- Trivia Night (with 50/50 Raffle?)
- Fundraising Walk/Run

Committee members volunteered to research and analyze each of these fundraising categories and present results at the second committee meeting. Each analysis would include:

1. Ballpark estimate of upfront investment?
2. Any special licenses required?
3. Any unique liability issues?
4. Brief outline of how fundraiser might work.
 - a. Location
 - b. Time of year
 - c. Branch involvement
 - d. Donor/customer sources
 - e. Marketing
 - f. Ballpark estimate of net proceeds for scholarships

Second Meeting

At the second meeting, we discussed the fundraiser reports. We had two objectives for our fundraising research, both related to the possible future decline in revenues from the annual book sale. First, we were trying to identify a big fundraiser that might take the place of the Branch Used Book Sale and could raise as much (or more) towards grants, fellowships and local scholarships. Second, we were looking for some small fundraisers that might supplement the Book Sale revenues if/when they decline.

Possible Big Fundraisers (with comments from reports and discussions):

- **Casino Night with Silent Auction.** There was a lot of information on the Internet about how to run a casino night fundraiser.

Jane Palmer reported: First Congregational Church (Glen Ellyn) recently had a Casino Night fundraiser. According to a Committee member who is a church member, First Congregational made \$35,000 to \$40,000. Another Branch member was on the committee that put it together. She said it involved an incredible amount of work and succeeded because the church members spent a lot of big bucks. The upfront work included getting donations for prizes and a live auction. Personally, between their personal donations to the auction and their own spending that evening, the Branch member and her husband probably “donated” over \$3,500. She said she’s not sure our AAUW membership has as many “high rollers” as her church. Although the event was open to the public, it was primarily attended by Church members and their friends and business associates.

We have about 100 Branch members, many of whom are retired or single or if married, only the Branch member may be fully committed to our mission. A church like First Congregational might have from 200 to 400 families and although many members might be retired or single, many other members are in the peak years of their careers, with significantly more disposable income than our average Branch member. Among these younger members, it’s likely both spouses of a married couple are employed and committed to the church.

Discussion by Committee:

- (1) Big shift in gears from Used Book Sale to Casino Night activities
 - (2) Big learning curve for members to be trained as dealers or bartenders
 - (3) Branch may not have as many members who are in the prime of their income earning years, and thus, willing to donate & spend a lot for a good cause
 - (4) Members may be reluctant to do the heavy solicitations required to make table sponsorship and silent auction profitable.
 - (5) Might be difficult to reach same high level of fundraising in years subsequent to the initial year.
- **Walk/Run.** Lindy Pond provided a verbal report. Key points:
 - (1) There are many fundraising walk/runs every weekend and a lot of competition to get the elite runners in your race.
 - (2) Most of the money is made from entry fees so getting a lot of participants is key.
 - (3) We would need to hire a professional Race Director to manage the race. This person maintains a mailing list of runners and running clubs.
 - (4) There are a lot of expenses related to closing streets, security, clean-up, setting up barricades to keep spectators out of the race, especially at the finish line.
 - (5) We would need to rent a professional timing system.
 - (6) Costs include t-shirts, prizes and food for participants. Also publicity.
 - (7) Most races don’t make a profit until the second or third year.

Discussion by Committee:

- (1) Again, very different from book sale

- (2) May not be a natural fit with our membership
 - (3) Start-up costs for the first and second year (prior to making a profit) may be prohibitive.
- **Film Festival.** Pam Starr reported on the possibility of a Film Festival as a fundraiser. Report is attached as **Appendix B**.

Key observations:

From Pam Starr: “Film festivals support the art of film making. The larger festivals are heavily subsidized. They are not generally charitable fundraisers. Proceeds go toward the next year’s festival. I think AAUW could provide a community educational opportunity by holding a film festival. At this point, however, I don’t see a way to make a film festival profitable using any of the existing film festivals as a model.”

From Committee: It was noted during discussions that some of the film festivals mentioned in her research also are geared to supporting local tourism and therefore, gain a lot of community support.

- **Ice Cream Social.** Vivian Bogdonoff proposed a community-based fundraiser centered around an ice cream social. Alternating years might be located in Wheaton or Glen Ellyn. Not sure of the scope of start-up costs or possible locations.

Some Committee concerns were briefly discussed at the meeting:

- (1) Location, indoors or outdoors?
- (2) Where would we get freezers to keep the ice cream cold?
- (3) What are health department rules related to a non-restaurant group selling food like ice cream?
- (4) Additional insurance liability costs?

Possible Supplemental Fundraisers:

- **Trivia Night with 50/50 raffle.** Kim Thacker’s report is included as **Appendix D**.

Committee Comments: This seemed like a good option for further consideration.

- (1) A Trivia contest would seem to be a good fit with our membership.
 - (2) Members could attend alone or bring spouse or guest(s).
 - (3) Kim conservatively estimated about \$1,000 revenue from one Trivia Night. Depending on popularity, this could be larger. It could also be repeated several times during the year, multiplying the returns.
 - (4) More research needed for possible inexpensive locations and cost of any additional insurance.
 - (5) Does Wheaton also have a fee for a non-profit raffle?
 - (6) A location with a cash bar could solve some issues but eliminate possible revenues from food/drink sales.
- **Membership-based Fundraisers:** Linda Johansen described several possible “small” fundraisers. Attached report (**Appendix E**) describes ideas (1) through (4). All are viable for our Branch and expenses could be kept low. Nos. (5) and (6) were also briefly

discussed. Games night would be similar to Trivia Night. Lindy suggested T-shirt sales with her help obtaining and printing the shirts at very low cost.

- (1) Mystery Night
 - (2) Progressive Dinner
 - (3) Old Treasures Sale
 - (4) Services Auction
 - (5) Games Night (board games or bean bag toss)
 - (6) Sell T-shirts
- **Sell Books On-line.** Sue Balk described how we might be able to sell some of our donated books on-line for a better profit than at the Civic Center sale. Her report is attached as Appendix F.

Committee Concerns:

- (1) Procedure seems labor-intensive.
- (2) The book sale attracts dealers because our books are unscanned. Although no scanning is being proposed, cherry-picking best books for on-line sales prior to the sale may eventually result in fewer dealers at Opening Night.

Alternative Proposal from the Committee: Form a “Summer Sales Committee” to go through leftover curios and coffee-table books and sell them online. Tasks involved could be done in a group (social aspect) that meets every week or two with their laptops or internet phone devices. If three or four members (or more) volunteer for “summer sales”, one or two members can search the internet for recent sales in order to set prices and another can list the books. After sales begin, one or two can work on mailing sold books. This “Summer Sales Committee” could also be viewed as a prototype if in 5 or 10 years from now the Branch decides to move toward a “virtual book sale” where more of our sales are done on-line rather than at the Civic Center.

Third Meeting

At the third meeting, the committee reviewed progress to date. It was generally agreed that we didn’t find an alternative fund raiser that could replace the book sale. However, if sales begin to decline due to the e-book effect, several membership fundraisers looked promising for supplemental fundraising.

We next turned our attention to the “book sale of the future” and how the current book sale might be improved.

Book Sale of the Future? First, we expect that the Branch will continue to sell “real books”. But some aspects of the current sale may evolve. Suggestions:

- Add an official “film” section to sell used DVDs and books on films and actors. Our publicity about donations could prominently announce that we accept DVDs
- Continue to evolve and improve our “collectibles boutique” (curios). Recognizing that the “old, old” books aren’t selling as well, focus more on finer books, gift books and first editions. If possible, put together collections of an author’s works and charge a premium over the usual price of books.
- Add consignment sales of used e-readers
- Make the sale more customer-friendly. For example, set up finer sorting categories

- Accept charge cards – charge card service fees are reduced for non-profits. Lindy Pond will investigate cost of renting a credit card swiper. (Her business uses card swipers when they sell from the truck at race sites.)

Possible Improvements: Location and Layout

- Location cannot be improved at this time. Our current sale location (Glen Ellyn Civic Center) is hard to beat with its central location, free tables, friendly staff, and reasonable pricing.
- Layout of sale tables could be improved
- We could offer “personal shoppers” at the sale for people who can’t come due to other commitments or infirmities
- We could be more organized with collection drives by neighborhood. (Cindy Trennert-Lukens will investigate recruiting Girl Scout troops to assist with neighborhood drives.)
- Should we have other drop-off places? Since we now have Health Track and Wheaton Sport Center, maybe we should also look into the Ryall YMCA and the Wheaton Community Center?

Possible Improvements: Marketing and Promotion

The first step in any marketing plan is to determine who your customers are. Who buys our used books?

- Older folks
- Students
- Book resellers

Newspapers and yard signs seem to be adequately reaching our “older” buyers. As for students, we may wish to work on some targeted marketing for the local colleges. The Branch set up a Facebook page about one month in advance of the 2010 sale. This kind of marketing will reach younger customers. In future years, the Facebook page can also be used to periodically remind “Facebook friends” of book donation opportunities. The Branch may want to contact local colleges to ask if they can add Book sale page links to the college websites or Facebook pages. If Twitter continues to grow, it should also be considered.

Another idea, similar to yard signs, would be “car signs”. Prior to the last sale, one Branch member put a book sale yard sign in her front windshield every time she parked the car. This kind of advertising could be formalized by making “sunshade” type of windshield signs available to members willing to use such a sign while parked.

The book resellers are the Branch’s best customers. They come back every year and their per capita spending far exceeds that of any other customers. The committee suggested that we treat them as our best customers with one or more of the following initiatives.

- Send them special pre-sale postcards with scanner discount
- Set up a special email list and send them periodic emails with teasers from sorting finds (the teasers can also be used on Facebook).
- Appoint a Branch member as book seller liaison.
- Other Opening night ideas to be friendly to book sellers:
 - Set up a corral or holding area for them to accumulate their purchases

- Special checkout line for large orders with helpers to bag or box up their purchases.
- Special area for “paid-for” items from Curios so they can shop the floor.
- Pass out numbers an hour or two before opening time on pre-sale night (5 pm?) so that they can preserve their place in line while they go out for dinner.

Several other Book Sale improvement suggestions were made during the “good/bad” brainstorming that merit further consideration. Some of these are:

- Display more AAUW info – more visible, multiple places (2010’s card table display was visually “lost” in front of wall of boxes)
- Selling tables seemed too crowded. There should be more space between tables for browsing. Try for more customer-friendly room arrangement in future sales
- Give member-workers and cashiers a map of categories so they can better direct customers
- Add a “Book Group” table with multiple copies of books suitable for discussion
- Consider more targeted marketing to Wheaton-Glen Ellyn book groups (get list from Book Store?) and to middle schools, high schools and local colleges.
- Ask Key Club and NHS students to help after school on move-in day (Monday) with moving and lifting boxes.

Finally, the Committee had also hoped to research generally what other branches are doing to raise funds for both AAUW Funds and for local scholarships. From April’s state convention, we collected some information on funds raised by Illinois branches but did not find time to pursue this topic any further. This information may already be available in some form from AAUW’s national office or from AAUW-Illinois. At some point, the Branch may wish to ask for a volunteer to tackle this research. We do feel that we are generally ranked above the median in Branch fundraising because of our long history of successful Book Sales.

SUMMARY

- The popularity of e-readers will eventually affect the profitability of the Book Sale
- The Committee determined that, in general, there is no “easy” way to annually raise \$10,000. Alternative fundraisers were considered but found to be not totally suitable to our membership’s mission and our members’ capabilities.
- The focus then changed to identifying supplemental fundraisers and to revamping the book sale.
- Best potential for supplemental fundraisers:
 - Trivia night with 50/50 raffle open to members, spouse, and friends (semi-public)
 - Membership fundraisers such as, mystery night, Mystery Night, Progressive Dinner, Old Treasures Sale, Services Auction and Games Night (board games or bean bag toss)
- Selling leftover “collectible” books, coffee table books and other finer books on-line through a “Summer Sales Committee”.
- The Book Sale of the Future:
 - Sell more than just books, such as, more DVDs or consider consignment sales of e-readers
 - Be more customer-friendly, especially to the book resellers who are our best customers
 - Continue to experiment with new technologies, such as Facebook or Twitter

Finally, the success of future book sales will also depend on our ability to recruit new members, integrate them into Branch activities and train them to be future leaders.

#

(APPENDICES are in a separate document.)