

Community Partners Enhance Programs

► LISA RAND

Reaching out to small businesses in the community has made a big difference for teens at my busy rural library and has generated a positive feeling and a sense of neighborliness. I try to help businesses know they are making an immediate positive impact on the teens. The businesses know that I will spread the word about their kindness as well as their services. I have learned that it never hurts to ask and that people often are willing and generous. There are grants available for large-scale projects, but local businesses have aided me in small ways that have a big impact.

The teens had suggested a cupcake decorating challenge, inspired by *Cupcake Wars* and similar cooking competitions. While I could make cupcakes at home, my schedule would not permit the time to make enough for an event. I asked the bakery next door to the library and the owner, Mary Dice, was willing to donate the cupcakes. I included her business name on flyers as a thank you: "Cupcakes generously provided by Dice's Creative Cakes." I picked up the donation on the afternoon of the program and then was able to use programming funds for icing and decorations. In April, I host a birthday party for Shakespeare, and a birthday party would not be the same without one of Mary Dice's cakes.

I asked a local music store if they would be able to bring a hands-on music experience to the library. I wanted youth to have a chance to handle instruments, if possible, or to have a DIY instrument-making experience with a professional musician. While I could teach myself the science of sound or lead a mini-music theory session, it seemed a better use of resources for me to draw upon the expertise of my neighbors at a local music store, Funky Frets. After our conversation, Kelly Thompson offered not only to bring the program I had been thinking about, but also to teach a three-week intro to ukulele for teens. Instruments would be loaned from the shop for the class period, giving me the chance to provide a meaningful learning experience that I could not afford without a generous local business. It also makes music instruction a possibility for community members who could not afford the opportunity.

For a tech take-apart (unmaking) program, I posted signs requesting material donations from the public. I indicated the kinds of items I was seeking and mentioned that the library would provide protective eyewear. I was prepared to purchase eyewear with programming funds, but Passmore Service Center, a local business that sells outdoor power equipment, was able to help us. This business might not be an obvious programming partner in the same way as a music shop, but it is an example of the good generated when local relationships are developed.

Across the street from our library is the State Theatre of Boyertown, a historic theatre that was saved from closure and given a new life through the passionate commitment of community volunteers. In the past year, they hosted a low-cost teen event: an afterschool showing of *Star Wars* followed by a



THE BOYERTOWN BEAR GREETES LIBRARY PATRONS.

pizza dinner hosted by a neighboring church. Our library is a keen supporter of the State Theatre, and I do whatever I can to help publicize their programs. For all of us, but especially teens who might not have their own vehicles, a movie theatre in the neighborhood is a crucial entertainment opportunity. We do not have public transportation in our community, and a local theatre is a true asset. By working with the State Theatre, I can help provide programs (such as a Mario Kart tournament) that would be very difficult on my own.

Many libraries depend upon donations from local businesses for prizes during summer programs. I am grateful for generous and ongoing support from small businesses in our town. The next partnership I hope to develop will be with Deal Me In Games, because we have a common passion for bringing tabletop games to youth and families.

My library serves a local school district of about 37,000 residents, with about 4,000 students in junior and senior high. Due to our location at the convergence of county lines, we also have patrons from several neighboring districts. We are a mixed community of blue collar and agricultural workers, with many people commuting to office jobs in surrounding suburbs and nearby cities. Regardless of the size of your community, reaching out and having conversations with neighboring businesses can open doors to partnerships and programming opportunities for your teens. ■

Lisa Rand is youth services coordinator at Boyertown Community Library in southeastern Pennsylvania.



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