

NEWSLETTER

Friends of Christchurch City Libraries

August 2019

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Chairperson's Report from AGM May 2019

Highlights of last year's activities for the Friends of Christchurch City Libraries included a wide ranging mix of places and subjects in our programme of book talks, the three days assistance we gave to the Libraries annual book sale, the opening and later Christmas Party and tour of Turanga with a record attendance of 70 Friends and the continued purchase of items that might not be covered by CCC funding to new or re-opened libraries.

The biggest event of the Friends' year is always the Libraries' book sale at Pioneer Recreation and Sports Centre and this year's was as successful as ever. Our forty volunteers contributed 430 hours to the sale which was attended by almost 6000 eager bargain hunters. The committee sincerely thanks all our volunteers.

On an utterly miserable Friday October 12 afternoon, the doors opened at the excitingly, beautiful Turanga and a new era in library service to Christchurch residents began. In Turanga's first six months nearly 600,000 people have visited, more than 278,000 items have been borrowed and there've been over 16 million touches to the Discovery Wall.

This year The Friends purchased a set of five wireless sound system microphones for Turanga tour guides to use and colourful, durable outdoor bean bags for the decking area at Spreydon Library. Committee members also assisted with hosting at the opening of the "Diego and Frieda" exhibition at South Library which was attended by both the Mexican Ambassador and Consul.

Soon after last year's AGM we were saddened to learn of Ruby Fowler's death. Ruby was a Life Member who helped form the Friends of Christchurch Libraries back in 1988 and retained her commitment and interest in the Friends for the next thirty years. Our city's library users owe Ruby a huge debt of gratitude for her many years of dedicated advocacy.

Finally I'd like to acknowledge the work of the current Friends' committee. Their continued support has been greatly appreciated.

Barbara Clarke

Your committee for 2019/2020

At June's AGM the following people were elected. Minutes Secretary: Wilma Tully; Treasurer/Membership Secretary: Norma Porter. Committee: Diane Bargas, Chris Baxter, Barbara Clarke, Alan Crisp, Shirley Edwards, Trish Faulkner, Julia Fomison, Janice Lavelle.

There were no nominations for the office of chairperson and this went to the new committee for resolution. Barbara Clarke agreed to resume the role for one further year but under the rules of the Friends' constitution a new chairperson must be elected at the next AGM.

Thank you, Elizabeth

On Tuesday 13 August before the monthly book talk, Carolyn Robertson, Christchurch City Libraries Manager presented Elizabeth Williams with her life membership certificate of our organisation.

Elizabeth recently resigned from the Friends' committee after an amazing 28 years of involvement. During that time she was a committee member, chairperson and deputy chair of the committee, membership secretary, organiser of volunteers for the book sale, organiser of speakers and, until Fendalton Library closed for its refurbishment, a friendly and welcoming hostess at our Book Talks.

Elizabeth particularly enjoyed her role as the convenor of the Books for Babies roster. Each week for more than ten years Elizabeth or another person on her roster would visit Christchurch Womens' Hospital giving a board book and library membership form to all the mums and babies there. That promotion, now ended, was a real delight for Elizabeth and her team of helpers.

Quite appropriately August's talk was by Colin Averill who told us about the book he has written 'The life of Leslie Averill'. Leslie, Colin's father, served as a medical superintendent at St Helens (forerunner to Christchurch Womens') from 1929 to 1962. Leslie was also known for being first up the 30ft ladder in the November 1918 capture of Le Quesnoy for which he was made a Citoyen d'honneur by the township on the 50th anniversary and a Chevalier of the Legion d'honneur by the French President in 1973.

Thank you, Elizabeth, for everything you've done for the Friends. You will be greatly missed on the committee.

How the Friends Came To Be

by Barbara Clarke and Stanley Richards

I was searching through the earliest copies of our newsletters recently and found this entertaining and informative August 1988 article written by Stanley Richards, editor of the newsletter, just four months after the Friends began.

‘ Many of you who joined the Friends of the Library as a result of our drive for membership during the recent Library Week will not be aware of the events leading up to the formation of the ‘Friends’.

The initiative came in April 1988 from retired Judge W. F. Brown who got a whiff of a move in high places to make the Canterbury Public Library user-pays. Concerned, as he put it, “about the economic climate and its effect on publicly funded services like the library” he felt that we couldn’t afford to lose or have commercialised an institution as important as the Public Library which offers so much to the community.

Judge Brown approached the City Librarian, Dorothea Brown (no relation). As it happened Mrs Brown had just been to a National Libraries Conference where there had seemed to be a passive acceptance among her fellow librarians that market-force economics would sooner or later dictate that libraries could no longer be funded in the way they had been.

Our City Librarian got mad. She threw away her prepared speech and off the cuff defended public libraries and their present funding system. “Access to the library is the right of every citizen for a rate that works out at the cost of a daily newspaper. What’s that if not value for money? When you apply user-pays to the library, it simply means those who can’t pay, can’t use it – especially our major users, the children and the elderly who are the least affluent”, she said. “Those councillors keenest on cost recovery and user-pays take a very narrow view. They treat libraries like swimming pools. But libraries are not cost centres. They are a stable, civilizing influence in a changing world and they foster our drive to preserve a record of our achievements and imagination, an instinct as basic as eating and drinking. In this most blessed country on earth, they tell me we can’t afford libraries!”

Thus it was that our City Librarian told the LIANZA Conference and councillors that our library, which had taken decades to build, was worth preserving. So when Judge Brown and Ruby Fowler came to her with similar concerns there was a meeting of like minds. “You have many friends out there in the community” the Judge told her. “Why don’t we find out how many are interested in helping?”

The result was a public meeting on 19 April, 1988 chaired by Councilor Alistair James from the CCC’s Cultural and Community Services Committee. 40 people attended and another 23 sent apologies and notes of support. Judge Brown told how he’d been disturbed by reports that a group of councillors had proposed a charge be put on all books. He considered this would be a tax on knowledge and a barrier to the fundamental freedom of self-development through reading. He was also concerned about the effects of such a move on children and young people.

“With the price of books so high” he said many people could not afford the books that they and their children might need, so it’s important that free access to libraries is maintained”.

All the speakers supported the idea of forming a ‘Friends of the Library’ Another speaker said if we added up the value of the books we borrowed each year, we would see how much we were receiving from the library. It was high time we started to put something back. We therefore formed a steering committee to get the whole idea off the ground.

Almost from the first it became clear that we were not simply, or even most importantly, a pressure group. Our posture should be more than a defensive one; our aim more positive than mere protection. If the library needs protection then our voices would be there; but more importantly, we envisage ourselves as friends in the fullest sense. Perhaps our most important function will be to provide a medium for those of us who need some tangible expression for the belief that the Public Library is one of the best things in our city; and upon that belief, to stand up and be counted.”

Stan’s vivid description of The Friends’ advocacy role could become significant as our city meets the imminent challenges of a new CEO and new councilors. They, too, may require convincing that our libraries are absolutely some of the best things in the city!



Now that repairs have finished at the Fendalton Library the last 2 book talks of the year will be held there.

Christmas Party 2019

This year’s Friends’ Christmas Party will be held at Turanga in the Square, 2 pm, Saturday 30 November. Chris Hay, Manager of Turanga, will share highlights of its first year since opening. Afternoon tea will follow

BOOK TALKS

Margaret Long

10 September at 12:30pm

At the Fendalton Library

She will speak about her garden and its development, her development as a gardener, and some of her garden travels.



Janet Wainscott

8 October at 12:30pm

At the Fendalton Library

Dementia: 'a hard thing to frame'

Janet Wainscott is a Lincoln-based writer who now writes mainly poetry and essays. In 2013 she published a book called *What Are You Doing Here: A conversation with dementia* about her mother's experience of dementia. In this talk she will explore the challenges of writing about dementia and the types of writing available on the topic.