

Brief History of the Friends of the Library, Smithville Texas

Mission Statement

The mission of the Friends of the Library, Smithville Texas is to promote programs and services, to entice reading for all ages, and to help with the continued growth and services of our very important library.

Our mission is designed to facilitate and promote the Library's mission: to create an environment that fosters the love of reading and lifetime learning with free and open access to materials, technology, and services to all.

Goals and Objectives

Our goals focus on the continued growth of our library "from books to mortar."

Goal 1: Promote the interest and welfare of the Smithville Public Library as a cultural and education asset to the City of Smithville Objective: Support successful activities for all age groups in our community.

Goal 2: Provide funds for special book collections.

Goal 3: Support the building fund for future expansion of the facilities.

History of the Friends

The history of the Friends of the Library, Smithville Texas precedes that of the library. In 1931, the existing Smithville Women's Group used space they shared with the city to create a public library. The library grew with donations and gifts and with the efforts of the Women's Group volunteers. In 1960, the Women's Group relinquished control of the library to the City of Smithville, but still vowed to provide support. Throughout the 1960s, funding was secured through memorial and gift donations to build a new library, which was dedicated in 1971.

The volunteers who had helped the library grow and provide services for the community established their status as a non-policy making and non-profit organization now known as The Friends of the Library, Smithville, Texas in 1987. Since then, this organization has grown to include nearly 100 members. Despite having no paid staff members, roughly 15 percent of our membership regularly volunteers their time with the Library for about 20 hours or more each month. These volunteer hours supplement the Library's six paid staff and additional four or five community volunteers who contribute another 10-12 hours each week. We are proud that our Library is open 45 hours each week, including evening hours, when many other libraries around the country are closing their doors early.

The Friends of the Library work together with many other area organizations affiliated with schools, clubs, and churches to identify the needs for and benefits of the Library's outreach services and literacy programming that are intended to provide a central connection for the needs of our community. The Smithville area has a low average income—nearly half (49.6%) of the student

population in our Independent School District currently falls below the income level that determines economically disadvantaged status; education is a lower priority than meeting other basic needs for too many of our residents, and therefore some members of our community cannot read well enough to gain meaningful employment. The Smithville Public Library takes an active role working innovatively to overcome the problem of illiteracy in our extended community. The Friends of the Library work to help the library do this by obtaining and providing some of the required resources. Currently, the Friends support the Library through funding activities for all age groups in the community. We are especially proud to support those programs aimed at improving literacy and fostering a love for books and reading in our youngest community members. *Little Bookworms* is one of our best-loved programs and a good example of an innovative method that teaches youngsters how to read, helps to forge strong bonds between parents and their children, and fosters a strong sense of community among all participants.

We additionally provide funds for the *Summer Reading Club* to encourage school-aged children to maintain their reading skills through the summer. Although its primary focus is on our youth, the Library has invited, for the past two years, the entire community to participate in this six-week read-a-thon program designed to harness a competitive spirit to read as many books as possible for as many community members as possible. The Friends pay for the authors and performers who visit each week to speak to the youngsters about books and reading, further encouraging interest among the community. The young readers who attain a certain level of reading have a big day in our city's Riverbend Park to celebrate their achievement. The Friends organization pays for the special activities and for lunch on that big day.

Our organization also serves adults in the community. Through foundation funds and donations, we support adult literacy programs such as English as a Second Language (ESL) and General Education Development (GED) Preparation. We also help make it possible for our library to bring reading materials and provide special programs for residents of our local nursing home. For the seniors that can still get to the library, we host a weekly Senior Game Day, where members of our community gather each Tuesday for dominos and other table games. The Friends hire a caterer to provide a special lunch the last Tuesday of each month.

In addition to these ongoing programs that The Friends of the Library support, we proudly support many special events that arise throughout the year, all toward our goals of promoting and supporting a strong community asset, the Smithville Public Library.