

## Friends in Need

By Sharon Carlson, Director, Archives and Regional History Collections

In the inaugural issue of *Gatherings* (Spring/Summer 1990), a small article on the last page announced the beginnings of a new organization. "The University Libraries will organize a Friends of the University Libraries group, which will afford its many friends and supporters the opportunity to join with like-minded people to bring their concerted efforts to bear on its activities and programs." Subsequent articles in the next 18 months detailed the progress of the fledgling organization. First came the Winter issue of 1991 when *Gatherings* reported on the "many positive comments" about the new publication as well as the good response to the plan to organize an official **Friends of the University Libraries**.

Other exciting developments quickly followed. When the staff and collections "physically" returned to the renovated and expanded Waldo Library, a key announcement appeared in the Fall 1991 issue of *Gatherings*. "The Friends of the University Libraries Steering Committee met for the first time Wednesday, November 6, in the new Waldo Library." Members at the first meeting included Dr. Peter Krawutschke, Dr. Hazel DeMeyer Rupp, Dr. Andrew Targowski, Dr. Gordon Eriksen, Dr. Robert Hegel, Ms. Judy Canaan, Mr. Bill Smith, Dr. Anna Kirkwood, Dean Charlene Renner, and Assistant Dean Bettina Meyer. A subcommittee formed to draft by-laws and a constitution. By April 1992, the organization had laid the general foundation and the first officers and board were elected. The first officers were Peter Krawutschke, President; Jan Dommer, Vice President; George Hebben, Secretary; and William K. Smith, Treasurer. Hazel DeMeyer Rupp, Robert L. Hegel, and Judith Canaan were the first elected board, with the President of the University and the Dean of University Libraries, then, respectively, Diether Haenicke and Charlene Renner, serving as ex officio board members.

From 1992 to today, nearly two decades later, the organization, the official Friends of the University Libraries, continues to sponsor annual events that are intended to (1) raise awareness of the rich library and information resources found at WMU, (2) garner supportive friends for the University Libraries, and (3) fund special library initiatives.

Members of the Friends staffed an information table in the Waldo Library Rotunda during the University's annual Family Festival in October 1992. They

greeted family members who came to view the impressive new library structure that had been dedicated a few months earlier. The first public relations venture, pencils inscribed with the name of the organization, and Friends' membership forms were distributed. Following in the footsteps of other Friends organizations, the WMU organization also, for many years, sponsored an annual used book sale, held in Waldo Library, during the fall semester. All funds were used to support the library collections and other special needs.

Over the years, the Friends have funded thousands of dollars of much needed support in equipment, one-time projects, and staff development. The annual amount of the funding has varied, but, most importantly, has occurred every year since the organization began. One notable area of support has been special equipment purchases. The first scanner for the WMU Archives was purchased by the Friends in 1999. The Friends also funded an LCD Data & Video Projector that has benefited hundreds of students getting library instruction. Digitization related purchases have included a Ricoh XR-2 camera for Special Collections and a Magellan Desktop Turntable for digitization of three dimensional objects.

A second area of support has included collections. In 1996 and 1997, unique printed volumes for the Music and Dance Library and Special Collections were purchased. Outside of traditional print items, the Friends have also helped purchase specialized databases, such as *Asian American Drama* in 2004.

Recognizing the value of funding staff development, the Friends established an award for library employees in 2003. Due to the efforts of the Friends, several employees have taken advantage of workshops or special training to expand their skills and enhance their job performance. The Friends have also funded special projects and one time requests. In 1997, the Friends helped finance a staff person to complete an inventory of lost and missing books. In 2004, they supported a proposal from the University Libraries marketing committee to purchase promotional materials. They also supplemented a digitization project honoring former president and board member, Bettina Meyer.

The Friends have been able to support these projects primarily through fund raising activities. For many years, the most visible fundraiser was the book sale. The book sales were popular and often raised several thousand dollars. As the volume of gift books accumulated, the success of the activity began to impinge on the daily operations of the Libraries. For a period of about three years, nearly a third of the Resource Sharing office space was turned over to book sale activities.

While the Friends took an active part in the sales, much of the preparatory work of sorting books and getting them ready for sale took University Libraries staff away from their regular duties. A program offered through Better World Books has now replaced the book sale.

The tremendous effort and number of people who were involved when evaluating, storing, retrieving, selling, and returning to storage hundreds and thousands of gift and discarded books for a once or twice a year sale has now been centralized and is handled by one or two staff members. And, with the new system, gift books continue to benefit the Friends and raise money. Today, one or two staff members can box and send gift books to Better World Books for sale on the Internet, capturing a far larger audience than the book sales. Net proceeds from the sale of these books go to the University Libraries and its Friends, with a percentage also benefiting world literacy efforts. To date, the global selling ability of Better World Books has kept pace with the proceeds from the book sales with personnel costs reduced significantly.

WMU Friends of the University Libraries, throughout its history, has continued to look for new ways to raise awareness and funds. In March 2008, the Friends sponsored the first annual "Antique Book Road Show," which featured a talk and book appraisal event by Dr. James Best. Non-members paid admission to hear the presentation and view the book appraisals. Participants with books for appraisal paid a nominal fee of \$5.00 with proceeds beyond the expenses going to the Friends of the University Libraries and to the beneficiaries of its supportive initiatives in the Libraries.

Based on the success of the first "Antique Book Road Show," a second event has been scheduled for March 28, 2009. Watch the Friends of the University Libraries website at <http://www.wmich.edu/library/friends/> for information on this fun event. Even if you don't bring a book for appraisal, it is a lot of fun to see some of the treasures owned by others in the Kalamazoo community.

One final area of support provided by the Friends is the publication of *Gatherings*. The Friends support one issue of this publication each year. The other issue is funded by the University Libraries. By the simple act of reading this newsletter, you have benefited from the activities of the Friends of the University Libraries. We always need more Friends. Consider joining the organization. The membership is a nominal \$10 per year. We need Friends to participate in programs and activities, too. **Won't you be our Friend?**