

# Friends: Why it's Worth the Upgrade

By Tonya Munn

One of seven 'Friends of Grand County Library' directors

If the Grand County Library District were a new car at the dealership, then the Friends of the Grand County Library contributions would be equivalent to an accessory package of upgrades — sunroof, heated steering wheel, bling-bling rims, leather seats and tinted windows.

Or say one were buying an airline ticket. The Grand County Library District would be airfare, and the support provided by The Friends would upgrade from basic economy to economy-plus or business — extra leg room, free baggage, flexibility of travel — making travel more enhanced, more pleasurable.

I'm not far off using these transportation analogies to talk about the work of the Friends group in relation to our library district.

Libraries, after all, can be considered vessels that transport you to a world of knowledge and learning. The Friends group raising funds for the district provides programming to help make that knowledge easily accessible, more enjoyable, enhanced.

Programs The Friends have sponsored through the years, as examples, are: the Lego programming; Babies, Books and Bag; 1000 Books Before Kindergarten; Summer Reading Program and its prizes for children, teens and adults; After-School Programming, writing and art programs such as Scary Story Contest and Shoe Box Floats; and video gaming sessions at libraries.

Additionally, The Friends gives necessary funds for snacks, prizes and treats that accommodate programming, as well as craft supplies, costumes, puppets, tot-sized furniture, shopping carts and even a popcorn machine at your library.

And the seed money for the now popular Access Grand, which allows library cardholders access to a variety of activities in Grand County and beyond, was Friends-contributed, thanks in part to a Friends pool of membership that has nearly tripled in size since the group first organized in 1984.

“Our fundraisers have grown from selling ‘mud cups’ and Rice Krispies Treats at the Fraser Rodeo to ‘The Tops of the Rockies’ at the Grand Lake Yacht Club,” said Marla Gall, Friends president, who was one of the founding members of the organization. The Tops of the Rockies annual event she mentioned now is the group’s most successful one-night fundraiser, which during the last three years has averaged \$30,000 annually.

“A 1940's dance featuring a jitterbug contest was a memorable event,” Gall said of events of Friends distant past.

Back when Gall and other moms started the Friends, the library district did not exist, rather a library division of county government. When a local family wanted to give a \$2,000 gift to the library, The Friends group formed so the gift could be channeled in such a way that it focused on improving children’s programming. The Friends group has ushered this mission for longer than three decades, promoting literacy and learning. Gall said she returned to the group’s board about 15 years ago to help continue this important mission. “I recognize how important libraries are to cultural growth and education,” she said.

Friends volunteer worker bees facilitate used-books collection at the local branches, plus a smattering of used-book sales throughout the county. Gently used books are sold on a continual basis at Sloopy's

in Grand Lake and at the Grand Park Community Recreation building as well as Grand Lake recreation building. Midtown Café in Granby and Blue Water Bakery in Grand Lake sell books with net proceeds donated to The Friends. And the Sky-Hi News building has served as a depository for donated books for many years.

Other Friends fundraising events are a Progressive Dinner in the Fraser Valley, Hot Sulphur Springs Pie Sale, and a tea luncheon in Granby.

Overall, The Friends group's \$40,000 a year income equates to about 75 percent in book sales and events, 10-15 percent in membership, 10-15 percent in donations and about 1 percent in grant money. Grand County's Friends group sometimes outsizes, or at least matches, the fundraising power of Friends groups in other more populated cities of Colorado, Gall said.

And The Friends of Grand County Libraries is proud of its track record, consistently donating to the district more than 90 percent of its earnings. "It's a very good ratio for a nonprofit," Gall said.

"We add the bells and whistles," she said. "We've engendered a great appreciation for the Library, and through our fundraisers and activities, The Friends have brought attention to the library and the importance of the library."

*To contact the Friends of Grand County Library or to become a member, visit [friendsofgrandcountylibrary.org](http://friendsofgrandcountylibrary.org). Or contact Friends simply by leaving a note at any library branch in Grand.*