

Small Kansas Library Hits the Streets to Build Awareness

Goals

What do epic gun battles and cowboys have to do with launching a community awareness campaign? A lot when you are talking about Dodge City, Kansas! The Dodge City Public Library Geek the Library launch, held outside in summer 2011, ended with a bang—literally.

“I do like to say that we probably had the only kick-off that ended in a fight and a shootout,” noted Director Cathy Reeves. “The Boot Hill Museum gun fighters and dancers showed up and entertained everyone, including making deputies of the children.”

Reeves and her team spent considerable time planning and promoting a large community introduction to the campaign to garner attention and make a lasting impression. In addition to writing two press releases, creating personal invitations to community leaders and media, and designing matching staff t-shirts, they also made geek boards and organized children’s activities for the event.

“We got into the spirit, and we wanted to do it right,” said Reeves. “If we were going to do it, it was going to be done up big. That’s why we moved it outside. We wanted people who were driving by to know that something was going on at the library.”

Over 200 community members learned more about the campaign and the library while enjoying



AT A GLANCE

- Service area: Dodge City and neighboring communities
- Service area population: 25,689
- Staff: 19 full-time, 6 part-time

hotdogs and soda donated from local businesses. It was a celebratory atmosphere, said Reeves, with live music, and staff handing out balloons and buttons. “We wanted something big and splashy. The kick-off really got people’s attention.”

Was it worth it? Absolutely, said Reeves. In addition to creating a buzz in the community, it enabled a bit more time for staff to embrace

the campaign, and it was something tangible for them to work toward and get excited about. It also helped energize her staff, she said, for their critical role in getting the word out in the community as the campaign moved forward. It was very important that everyone played a role in the kick-off, she added. “If the

staff does not have a stake in the success of this campaign from the beginning, it will never work.”

Campaign

Dodge City was part of a larger Geek the Library campaign in Kansas supported by the State Library of Kansas. This allowed Reeves and her

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staff to attend campaign presentations and workshops, and reap the benefits of promotions going on in other communities. As a result, Dodge City was able to partner with another library system to promote the campaign jointly at a local event that draws in visitors from surrounding cities.

Overall, Dodge City ran a grassroots campaign. Instead of depending on a large budget, Reeves and her team mainly relied on creativity and enthusiasm—a tall order, but a familiar challenge. Part of Reeves' strategy was to gain the support of people who were already library advocates and encourage them to continue to promote Geek the Library. For example, when she informed the library board about her plans, she gave each member a Geek the Library t-shirt. Reeves also used her quarterly presentation to the Dodge City Commission to talk about the campaign and its role in educating the public about the value of the library—and commissioners received 'I geek Dodge City Public Library' buttons.

Reeves' efficient approach is certainly a factor in the campaign's success. When she attended a local business expo put on by the chamber of commerce, for example, she not only talked to local officials and other community leaders about the services the library provides to the community, but took the opportunity to hand out posters to local businesses. She also integrated the campaign into current programs and promotions, and used Geek the Library as a starting point for discussions whenever appropriate, such as her monthly appearance on a local cable channel.

Outcome

Due to their participation in Geek the Library, Dodge City staff took part in more diverse events, and went out into the community more often and with intent to have a dialogue. Since the campaign is catchy and gets people's attention, noted Reeves, it motivated her team to actively talk to people about everything the library has to offer, especially at events. No one, said Reeves, could sit back on the sidelines. Geek the Library, she added, also acts as a springboard for more serious conversations—especially those educating the community about library funding—without being pushy or boring people.

Reeves plans to continue to promote Geek the Library at least through fall 2012. While it's difficult to accurately gauge how it has affected community awareness, she said, it has been an all-

around positive experience.

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The most important results, she noted, are the lessons her staff have learned about promoting a major campaign and making it

work at the local level, and the library advocacy skills they have gained. "Everyone has seen the benefit of working together to promote something and the value of listening to and talking to our community."

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For more information about Geek the Library, visit

[| geekthelibrary.org](http://geekthelibrary.org)