

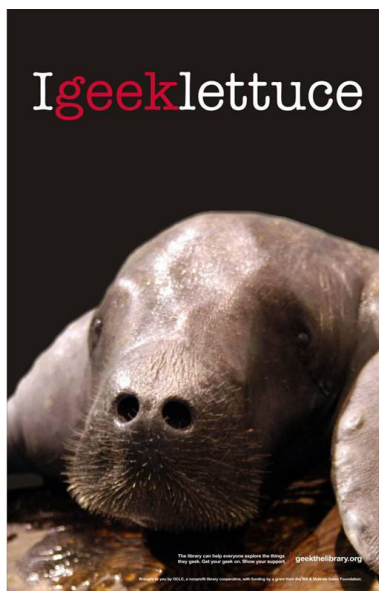
Creating a Culture of Library Advocacy

Goals

Before heading the Manatee County Public Library System's Geek the Library awareness campaign, Stacy Reyer had minimal knowledge about library marketing and advocacy. After spearheading local efforts in and around Bradenton, Florida, since May 2011, this youth services librarian now has a tool kit that's vast and growing. Fueled by the support of her director and an interest in outreach, Reyer and the staff at all six branches have successfully elevated the library in the minds of community members and helped the library become a topic of conversation.

"The Geek the Library campaign is working," said Reyer, "in that community members, other agencies, businesses and organizations recognize the campaign—everyone knows it!"

Leading the effort on her own has been no small task, but Reyer has taken it in stride. The project needs time, energy and a lot of enthusiasm, she noted, but anyone at any level can handle it. To set the tone prior to launch, Reyer held two all-staff informational meetings and asked branch managers to conduct follow-up sessions. While Reyer has gone above and beyond by making personal visits to each branch, creating strategic plans and branch assignments, as well as implementing larger initiatives such as raising funds and developing movie theater advertising, she insists that the built-in flexibility



AT A GLANCE

- Service area: 743 square miles
- Service area population: 327,293
- Staff: 59.75 full-time

gives any library—regardless of resources—the ability to make an impact.

Her initial goal was to make the library more visible, which she and her team have achieved. Now, she said, the objective is to build on the awareness that's been created and educate the community about the value of the library and the need for local support—no easy task.

Campaign

According to Reyer, in order to create awareness outside of the library, you have to have internal buy-in—especially with staff who are on the front lines.

"I think [the campaign] is a really important and big education for support staff... Once you talk to them, they understand and they get excited. They start to see how the system works, what we bring to the community and how we're funded. The campaign also gives everyone an excuse to talk to the public

about these kinds of things, because otherwise it's difficult to broach the subject if you don't have a campaign behind it."

"I think it's a really important and big education for support staff... Once you talk to them, they understand and they get excited. They start to see how the system works, what we bring to the community and how we're funded."

— Stacy Reyer, Youth Services Librarian

Geek the Library Case Study: Manatee County Public Library System

Continued

Getting staff on board and maintaining the energy can pose many challenges, she said—especially with multiple locations. “You’ve got to rally the forces at the branch level because if they don’t buy in to it and if they’re not excited about it, their staff won’t be.”

You also have to provide firm, but reasonable expectations, she said, and accept that inevitably some people will be more enthusiastic and initiate more campaign-related activities than others.

To ensure engagement, Reyer established a Friday and outside event t-shirt policy, created personalized buttons for all of the staff and asked that they wear them regularly, and developed an ongoing ‘patron of the month’ program for each branch. (Once a month, each branch chooses a patron to be part of the campaign. They

receive a photo shoot and a personalized poster provided at the downtown location.)

“These small activities help keep staff engaged and interested in promoting the campaign.”

Reyer also keeps her eyes open for internal super supporters who she enlists to reinforce goals and help motivate staff to use

Geek the Library to engage with patrons and community members. One person simply can’t be everywhere, she said, so it’s vital to develop a network of internal staff volunteers who want to go the extra mile.

Outcome

Campaign efforts have helped unify staff across the system, noted Reyer. They started the process for improved organizational awareness about the library’s key role in the community, and why it’s important to consistently communicate positive

messages and stories. For Reyer, the experience has been tremendously valuable. “I’m learning to communicate with different kinds of people that I normally wouldn’t have been dealing with, from outside vendors to county government. I’m also learning about leading my own staff and how to motivate and communicate effectively to them.”

A combination of Reyer reaching out to organizations and businesses and community buzz have led to new opportunities, such as a partnership with a local museum. There is now a much more profound understanding within the organization about the benefit of combining efforts as a system and partnering to gain access to new audiences, she said. “You reach so many more people if you have a partnership with a preexisting entity because the message isn’t just coming from the library, and when they share

something, they already have a group of followers that help spread things to a broader audience.”

The experience has also helped Reyer and others appreciate the importance of ongoing library advocacy efforts—both internally and in the community. The library and need for support should be top of mind for library staff and stakeholders, local decision makers and

community members all the time, she said.

“Advocacy is something that needs to happen every day, with various activities from various people. It has to happen at a local level, with all the other stakeholders and then with community members. It can’t just come from the library.”

“Advocacy is something that needs to happen every day, with various activities from various people. It has to happen at a local level, with all the other stakeholders and then with community members. It can’t just come from the library.”

— Stacy Reyer, Youth Services Librarian

For more information about Geek the Library, visit

geekthelibrary.org