

## Love your library? Be a Friend



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By Karen Cernich

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The scent of wild orange greeted patrons at the Scenic Regional Library in Warrenton Tuesday night as they gathered in the meeting room for a presentation on using essential oils to ease physical ailments — everything from colds and allergies to hot flashes and mood swings.

Melanie Lewis and Britney Jensen spoke to a crowd of some 25 patrons about their personal experience using essential oils and shared samples.

Such an activity might once have seemed out of place at a library, but not any more, especially not at the seven branches in the Scenic Regional system.

Other new programs Scenic patrons will find at their libraries include beginning yoga, crocheting, knitting and quilting classes, watercolor painting classes, computer classes, a beekeeping lecture and Lego clubs, to name a few. There also are movie nights, wine tastings, cooking and craft classes, teen game nights . . .

It's all part of an effort to do more to draw patrons into the library and also to reach out to them more where they are, said Library Director Steve Campbell.

"We are getting people coming into the library who have never come in before," he remarked. "We are getting really a great response. Some of our events have 40, 50 people showing up."

The branches hadn't done more programming like this before because they all had very limited staff, Campbell explained. To make it possible, the library cut some areas of the budget to allow for hiring more part-time staff.

“So now we are able to get the branch managers and staff out to daycares and Chamber meetings, to be more involved in the community . . . and it’s been a huge success.

“We do story times at daycares and preschools. The Union branch manager, Diane Disbro, even goes to a local nursing home to read to the adults.”

The smaller branches have taken some of their programs off site to accommodate the large turnouts.

For example, the Owensville branch has had events at the Gasconade County Historical Society museum, and the Hermann branch has used its community archives.

“We’ve been able to do a lot of coordination with community organizations to make up for the fact that our buildings are so small,” said Campbell.

In addition to boosting programming and outreach, Scenic has made efforts to get patrons more involved at the library, said Campbell. And that, too, has gone well.

“We started to do that last year with trying to get people to come to volunteer at the library, to re-shelve books and prepare for story time,” he said. “We also started doing our book sales differently.

“In the past, we would have staff run them . . . and we started having them completely staffed by volunteers. We had over 100 volunteers at our last book sale.”

Those willing volunteers were obviously “friends” of the library, so Scenic decided to make it official and set up an organization where they can show their support and be as involved as they want to be.

“We thought a Friends group would be a great way to get them organized throughout the year,” said Campbell.

#### Each Branch Has Its Own Friends

Scenic Regional’s new Friends of the Library is just now accepting members, although the program has been in the planning stages for some time. It began with the establishment of the Scenic Regional Library Foundation in August 2012, said Campbell.

“We have seven branches, and we want a Friends group in each one, however we wanted them to kind of be coordinated,” he said. “So we thought what would be really great would be to have the Foundation oversee the Friends groups.

“It’s not always like that in other libraries. The Foundation deals with trying to get big donations and Friends just do fund-raisers and volunteer work,” said Campbell. “But we needed some kind of organization to be able to coordinate all seven Friends groups so they all kind of follow the same rules . . . keep them all on the same page.”

The Foundation board includes:

President, Alvera Heeger;

Vice President, Jamie Keen;

Secretary, Kathy Baumstark; and

Treasurer, Shirley Gassei.

Members from Warren County — Shirley Gassei, Lake Sherwood; John Deutch, Warrenton; Sharyn Rugh, Wright City; and Cathy Engelage, Warrenton;

From Franklin County — Chris Stuckenschneider, Washington; Jamie Keen, St. Clair; Alvera Heeger, Union; and Debbie Maczuk, New Haven; and

From Gasconade County — Linda Miskel and Kathy Baumstark, Hermann; and Doug Dunlap and Diane Lairmore, Owensville.

Campbell serves as an ex officio (nonvoting) member.

“It’s a good mix of people who have time and are very eager and others who may not have a lot of time because they are so involved in other things, but they are very influential and have a lot of connections,” said Campbell.

Each Scenic branch — Warrenton, Union, New Haven, St. Clair, Pacific, Owensville and Hermann — will have its own Friends group. People will sign up to be a Friend for that branch.

Friends memberships begin at the \$10 level and go up to \$500. Memberships are open to individuals, families and businesses.

Every membership comes with these perks:

- 10 percent discount on books purchased at the library’s fall and spring book sales;
- Invitations to special members-only programming and events at any branch; and
- For members who sign up the first year, their name and contribution level (including individual and family members) will be engraved on a plaque which will be placed on permanent display in their local branch.

All of the dues and funds raised by each branch’s Friends will be used specifically at that branch, Campbell said. It won’t go into a general fund or be used at another location.

Each Friends group will have its own officers and committees to run and plan events and activities, Campbell noted, adding that Friends can choose to be as involved with the library as

they want to be. They can pay their annual dues and be done with it, he said, or they can volunteer to be an officer, serve on a committee, help with fund-raisers or more.

Each Friends group will have a meeting in the spring to elect officers and assign committees. Those will be held each year to elect new officers.

To sign up as a Friend, library patrons can visit their local branch to pick up a brochure with the application for in it or they can go online to [Scenicregional.org/friends](http://Scenicregional.org/friends) to print out an application that can be mailed in or dropped off at their branch.

“It’s important to point out that the Friends groups and Foundation were not just created to raise money,” stressed Campbell. “They are for support as volunteers, helping with our book sales, publicizing the library services, being like ambassadors for the library.

“It’s really to promote the library and get new volunteers in the branches,” he remarked.

## Libraries Are

### Filling New Roles

Looking ahead to the future of Scenic Regional, and all libraries really, Campbell is optimistic.

“It’s been really exciting to see how everything has unfolded,” he said. “Everyone has been really enthusiastic about doing all of this.

“Hopefully the Friends group will really take off too. People have tried in the past to get involved (at the library), but there wasn’t anything there for them, so now they have this chance.”

But whether people decide to sign up as Friends of their library or not, Campbell encourages them to check out what’s new with their local branch. Today’s libraries are about far more than just traditional books, he said, although they have plenty of those.

“In the past, we were in our buildings, and that was it,” Campbell remarked. “We were like warehouses for books. People would come in, check out and that was all we did.

“But now things are changing rapidly,” he continued. “Libraries are trying to fill new roles. And I think we’re doing a very good job of that, thanks to the staff.”

To keep up with all of the programs being offered at Scenic branches, patrons can sign up for an email newsletter that lists upcoming activities and happenings at the library branches. Visit [www.scenicregional.org](http://www.scenicregional.org) for information.