

Dynamic leaders of Bellingham library sales stepping down

DEAN KAHN - THE BELLINGHAM HERALD

The March book sale that just ended at Bellingham Public Library was a sad affair for the volunteers who make the event a big fundraiser for the library.

It was the last sale organized by Ken and Phyllis Weber.

They've been organizing the library's sales the past 14 years. During that time, the Webers have donated thousands of hours, and introduced innovations that boosted revenue from the sales more than six-fold - from \$12,000 a year to nearly \$75,000 last year.



• ABOUT THE WEBERS

A public reception honoring Ken and Phyllis Weber will be held from 2 to 4 p.m. March 17 at Bellingham Public Library, in the downstairs lecture room.

To join Friends of the Bellingham Public Library, fill out an application, available at the library and at the library's Web site, bellingshampubliclibrary.org. Membership is \$5 a year.

Book sales at Bellingham Public Library later this year will be held May 20-23, Sept. 2-5 and Dec. 2-5.

They are so devoted," said Garland Richmond, a board member of Friends of the Bellingham Public Library, which runs the sales. "They've been the heart and soul of the whole organization."

The sales have raised more than \$600,000 for library purchases since they began in the early 1970s. But consider this: sales were averaging about \$12,000 a year when the Webers took command. Since then, sales have brought in nearly \$380,000 above what would have been raised if revenues had continued to poke along at \$12,000.

"We kept coming up with ideas," Phyllis explained.

Indeed they did. First off, in 1996, they added a December sale to augment the spring Ski-to-Sea sale. That's also the year "nearly new" books were first put on display for sale on the library's main floor.

Then, in 2002, they started sales of children's books, and initiated a "mini" September sale. A spring mini sale followed, and those mini sales soon became full-fledged sales of their own.

Five years ago, they began selling rare and other high-value books on eBay, and for the past three years have sold quality books through an online book outlet based in Auburn.

By turning to the online world, the Webers starting raising money for the library that had been going to book dealers who once prowled the sales like wolves at a sheep convention.

As the Friends group raises money, library administrators submit a wish list on how to spend it.

Equipment and programs supported through the years include automatic checkout machines, children's books for the new Barkley branch, summer reading programs for youths, laptop computers, a microfilm scanner, and cabinets, tables and chairs.

The Webers joined the Friends in 1991 because Phyllis is an avid reader and they both enjoy being active in the community. They became co-chairs of the sales three years later.

The Webers met and married in 1975 while in Seattle, where Ken, now 75, was a postal inspector and Phyllis, 73 worked for the Postal Service and the Social Security Administration. They retired to Whatcom County because Phyllis grew up here.

The Friends group has about 30 year-round volunteers, and another 70 people who help at sales. Last year, members tallied about 10,000 volunteer hours - collecting, sorting, pricing and storing books. The Webers accounted for nearly 20 percent of those hours.

With the sales down to a science, the Webers decided it was time to step aside. Ken's sore back and wrists need a rest, and they're looking forward to more time for travel.

"You have to get away and let new people take the responsibility," Ken said.

Richmond said their replacements haven't been chosen, but said it might take three to four people to fill the void.

"We've been spoiled by Ken and Phyllis," he said.