

# Who has seen the chocolate? Fundraising with a literary twist

By Anne DeGrace.

Lately, my job as Adult Services Coordinator for the Nelson Public Library has morphed somewhat from my job description. Budgetary restraints and the rising costs associated with acquisitions have turned me into something else: a motivated fundraiser.

The Friends of the Library, like Library Friends groups everywhere, raises money for special purchases through book sales and raffles. Great support, greatly appreciated. But more is always needed to satisfy the demands of Nelson's voracious library-uses, and the aspirations of its staff and board to be the best library possible.

Chief librarian June Stockdale and I, supported by an enthusiastic board, share a love for creative fundraising. For three years we ran an event called Oysters, Authors and Ale, featuring celebrity MCs and bivalves, in partnership with Columbia Basin Alliance for Literacy. (Celebrities included Mark Forsythe, Sheryl McKay, and Arthur Black; the bivalves preferred to remain anonymous.)

On the one hand we were overworked and overstressed as the event took over our regular work; on the other hand, we built great relationships and had a blast. But we didn't make a whole lot of money considering the time spent.

This year, we're trying something different, honouring our local entrepreneurs in a sales partnership with a library twist, launched in time for Library Month. We have three products on display in a handcrafted case at the circulation desk.

The gorgeous bookmarks are fairly traditional Library fare made special with artwork by local artists, and selling well. These we'll keep through the year.

Less traditional is the special Library Blend of coffee roasted locally by our own Oso Negro, and which we've called: *Read all Night! Rich, swashbuckling adventure with mystery and romance set in Java, Uganda, and Central America.* Fresh-roasted and sold by the pound and half-pound, the aroma is driving our circulation staff crazy.

But it's the chocolate we had the most fun with.



Chocolate 'books' from Nelson Public Library.

Chocolate, incidentally, is central to our library's functionality: it is present at Department Coordinator meetings and Board meetings, and it often turns up unannounced on the back counter by the kettle. It's in our blood, so to speak. So it was a no-brainer that chocolate should be part of our fundraiser, knowing that, at the very least, staff would be a major customer. As it turns out, the attraction is universal.

There are eight different titles for Belgian dark and milk chocolate bars the size and shape of a hardcover book spine and produced by Nelson's Chocofellar for the Library. Bashing around ideas between Board, management, and Staff, we came up with labels designed to look like bookspines: *Fall on Your Coconut*, *Pride and Pecans*, *In the Skin of a Raisin*, *Fifty Shades of Chocolate*, and *The Call of the Wild Hazelnut*. There's also *Much Ado About Chocolate*, *Phantom of the Almond*, and the

haunting question: *Who has Seen the Chocolate?* (with apologies to W.O. Mitchell and all other authors).

The book spine wrappers and coffee labels were all designed in-house. Initial set-up was a little time-consuming, but now that it's in place, we're good to go annually with minimal effort. We're already brainstorming next year's coffee and chocolate names.

The usual fare for library sales—book bags, bookmarks, mugs—work well enough, but it's the consumable aspect of chocolate and coffee—two important food groups in my books—that make this a winner.

The projected result? Larger coffers to benefit our collections. Energetic staff fuelled by coffee and chocolate and the laughter from patrons tickled by clever titles. And, perhaps, a rewritten job description on my part.

In a perfect world, we wouldn't need to fundraise for collections. But fundraising is a reality that is unlikely to go away. If we have to fundraise, we figure we might as well make it fun. Delicious is a bonus.

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