

A Week of Our Own

Create a National Library Week Celebration that Promotes Good Will All Year Long

By Karen B. Brunner

National Library Week April 12-18 is the premier marketing opportunity for law libraries. This widely recognized national event provides the framework to draw positive attention to your library every year. If you're wondering what details are involved in planning a celebration—and motivating your staff to be enthusiastic participants—read on.

We began celebrating National Library Week at Riker Danzig in 1986. Because it was my first year with the firm, I suggested to my staff that we throw a party and make the refreshments ourselves. The party was so well attended and generated such good will that the firm agreed to cover the cost the following year. Since then, the party has been the centerpiece of our annual celebration with the lone exception of one year when the library was under construction.

Through the years, some aspects of our celebration have changed and some have not. From the beginning, everyone at the firm was invited. In the early years, people from outside the firm were also invited, including colleagues who were not yet celebrating in their own libraries, vendors, and even the firm's architect. We remain committed to including everyone, from partners to support staff, even as individual paper invitations have been replaced by mass e-mails.

We pick a new theme each year and use it throughout the planning process. In the beginning, we made an effort to connect with themes picked by the American Library Association (ALA) or the Special Libraries Association. The library staff also designed and produced commemorative bookmarks, often using a variation of the ALA theme. (While we still distribute bookmarks each year, we now purchase them from ALA or companies such as Upstart.)

Make It Your Own

National Library Week festivities range from simple to elaborate. You could plan daily events or host one big party. Additionally, the number of events at one library can vary from year to year. Holding National Library Week events is standard practice for some libraries; as a result, they know what works well and what does not. If a successful formula has been developed and used repeatedly, however, it may be more difficult to generate excitement with the staff. If this is the case, reminding seasoned staffers of past success can serve as positive reinforcement and provide the motivation to take on the necessary work.

It is essential to begin planning a few months in advance. At the first planning meeting, make decisions about the exact goals for that year. These goals may vary as a result of the previous year's experience. As noted, we started small with just a party. Eventually, we expanded our celebration to include an event on each day of the week, including a luncheon seminar. Time constraints convinced us to cut back and focus our attention on the party itself. We now encourage the account managers working with the firm to coordinate with us and conduct events for Westlaw and Lexis users, allowing our celebration to span three days without placing an undue burden on staff.

Picking a theme can be the biggest initial challenge because everything else ties in with it. Keep in mind that themes can be simple, such as using images of cats to celebrate the new library *catalog*. (Or, if you're looking for a challenge, consider something more complex, such as the theme we chose in 1999 to reflect on the end of the millennium: "Say Goodbye to the 20th Century -Convenience Foods to Computers—20th Century Technology Changed Life Forever!") Your theme can be related to happenings at the firm, the larger institution, the library itself, or it can reflect events in the outside world. Some years, we

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Guess the Number Contest

A tradition at Riker's celebration is a "Guess the Number" contest that begins on the first day of National Library Week. This activity dates back to a contest held in one of the early years, entitled "Guess the Weight of a Martindale-Hubbell volume." The next year, we filled a container with peanuts, placed it on the reference desk and invited colleagues to guess how many nuts it contained. This contest was so popular that it became a key component of our successful formula.

Each year, a large container is filled with an edible item related to the theme, such as foil-wrapped chocolate baseballs or cat-shaped cookies. (Rubber gloves are worn when counting unwrapped items.) Only the person who counts the items as they are placed in the container knows how many there are. We also seal the container with tape to prevent cheating, while still enabling people to pick it up for closer inspection. It is amazing how scientific some people are about making their guesses! Contestants write their names and guesses on sheets of paper and leave them in a small box; contestants are encouraged to enter more than once. An e-mail message informing people that the contest has begun also signals the beginning of National Library Week activities. One of the most anticipated moments at the party is the announcement of the actual number of items and the winner, who keeps the container. More than once, we have had two winners and have awarded a gift card to the second person.

have chosen light-hearted themes such as “April = Showers, Baseball and National Library Week.”

Once you select a theme, brainstorm to flesh out other details such as what colors you will use. For example, because 2008 was an election year, we picked a patriotic theme and coordinated red, white, and blue paper goods. With available budget and space, you might also choose to decorate with flowers and balloons in the appropriate colors and design an invitation that conveys the theme to invitees. The theme can be extended to refreshments as well. For example, our library provides a cake decorated in the chosen colors, punch, and a light snack related to the theme. In 2008, the snack was bowls of the official “Presidential Inauguration Jelly Belly Mix,” labeled accordingly.

Party favors are another area to consider. The Internet has made it much easier to locate items needed for the party, especially the favors. In the early years, we gave out favors such as custom-printed pencils and Post-It Notes®. In 1999, individual packages of Hostess® cakes served as an example of how technology made life easier in the 20th century and were very well received. The baseball-themed celebration prompted another big hit with favor bags of peanuts, popcorn, and Crackerjacks®.

You may want to provide more than just a party by including an educational component in your National Library Week celebration, such as a new book display, online product demos, or library tours. Your IT department can also be a valuable resource; consider getting them involved in the creation of a multimedia presentation about your library (while you have their attention, they might be willing to help you design invitations and posters as well).

Engaging Your Audience

You may determine, as we did in 1988, that your party needs more than just refreshments to engage participants. Our solution was something we termed “games of wit, mind-boggling depth, and erudition.” These quizzes and puzzles became an instant success and remain one of the most popular aspects of the celebration. Categories have ranged from legal trivia on such subjects as the U.S. Constitution to puzzles geared specifically to the firm. One year, we asked colleagues to submit the title of their favorite books in advance and used the responses to create a matching game. For our “Leap into the Library” theme, we used the Internet to create quizzes with more frog trivia than you would

ever want to know. We always marvel at how industriously attendees work to complete as many questions as possible.

Obviously, because this process can be very time consuming, it is wise to seek help from outside sources, such as the Web pages of LexisNexis Infopro, West Librarian Relations, and AALL’s Private Law Libraries SIS. It is also important to remember to use simple formats, such as matching and multiple-choice, which are easier to complete and correct. Be sure to include a place for people to write their names, especially if you plan to award prizes.

If a particular group at your organization is reluctant to participate in the celebration, try reaching out to them. We have made an effort in recent years to involve more attorneys in the festivities by conducting several “lawyers only” e-mail contests. In the first, we asked them to complete the sentence “I did not sign out this book because...” We received many interesting responses, including a cleverly written scene from a play with a pirate theme. The next year, we asked participants to describe the appropriate punishment for taking a book from the library without signing it out. The winning entry was a very funny poem that even included the names of library staff.

Use your creativity to encourage participation. If you work with a small group of people, create a picture collage of coworkers’ children or pets in the library and challenge participants to guess parents/owners. Charity can be a great motivator as well. Our most successful attempt at encouraging involvement was a 2007 book drive in which we collected hundreds of new and used children’s books and donated them to a local after-school program.

The Big Day

The day of the party can be very intense if careful planning has not been done; each staff member must know his or her responsibility, and cooperation is key. Plan to begin setting up about two hours before the party and consider sending e-mail reminders to all potential attendees. At our parties, the cake is the centerpiece and is surrounded by two bowls of punch (very popular) and all the necessities: cups, plates, napkins, and forks. Dishes with snacks such as pretzels or nuts are distributed on tables, along with copies of the various quizzes. One staff member serves as photographer and snaps pictures of attendees chatting or busily engaged in the puzzles.

At Rikers, we have enjoyed high

participation from all sectors of the firm. Many attorneys, especially those who have been with the firm for a long time, look forward to the party as much as the staff does. In fact, there are often so many people in the library at once that it is hard to talk to everyone. As hectic as it can be, the library staff enjoys it too. After about 90 minutes, the crowd disperses and the staff begins the clean up process, being careful to keep refreshments and party favors available while returning the library to normal.

After the party, staff members correct the quizzes and post the answers in the library. A display of prizes, many donated by vendors, is assembled, and winners are notified by e-mail to come to the library and claim their prizes. All who participate in the contests receive a prize, although some get more than one based on how many quizzes were attempted and the number of correct answers. We also send prizes and party favors to the branch offices to include them in the celebration and mount the best party photos on the wall by the reference desk under the poster advertising the party. People’s enjoyment in looking at them sustains the positive energy generated by the event. We leave the display up until after summer associates arrive so that they can see that the library is more than just a serious place.

Your final step is to conduct a staff meeting soon after National Library Week so everyone can review what worked well and what did not. Maintain the checklists used at planning meetings and make notes to keep in a file for future planning. A budget report of expenses should also be included.

In summary, a National Library Week celebration is your chance to:

- Foster solidarity through an organization-wide event that reaches out to all groups
- Provide the opportunity to interact with library staff in an informal setting
- Promote the library, staff, and services
- Give people something to look forward to that is unique to the library
- Unify library staff through a team endeavor

The bottom line: don’t miss out on this PR opportunity tailor-made for your library! ■

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