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## Friends group brings books, extras to library

By [Jessie L. Bonner](#) ([Contact](#))

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Imagine no magazine racks on the south end of the South County Regional Library. No glass bookcases to display in the atrium. The lengthy list of library programs cut down to a simple few.



Photo by Tristan Spinski / Daily News

Keira Amstuntz, left, vacationing from Indianapolis, Indiana, reacts to her nine-year-old daughter, Chase Mulholland, telling her that she read ten chapters of her Judy Blume book during a family reading session at the South County Regional Library in Estero on Thursday afternoon. The Friends of the South County Regional Library raised \$18,000 for programs and equipment at the south county regional library in Estero. The group will hold their final book sale of the season on Saturday from 9 a.m. until 4 p.m.

That fancy LCD projector? That's gone, too.

That would be one of the largest libraries in the region minus the small band of residents who make up the Friends of the South County Regional Library, a group that

brought in \$18,000 in donations for the branch last year.

They pay for the things the library, which served more than 250,000 patrons during the last 12 months, cannot.

“We all know public coffers are limited,” said Claire Hauenstein, 66, a founding member of the Friends of the South County Regional Library. “We buy things that are not in their budget.”

The group that formed in 2004 with just six members who agreed to support the library through fundraising now has more than 600 and will hold its last fundraiser of the season on Saturday with a book sale.

The group does three sales a year, which typically draw in about 500 people and \$8,000 annually, said Carolyn Piscitello, 62, a retired teacher who knows the Dewey Decimal System well after working in school libraries in New York for 15 years.

After moving to Southwest Florida to retire, Piscitello offered to volunteer at the Estero library and put books away.

In a small room near the library entrance, she and Hauenstein fold paper napkins and place settings for a luncheon to celebrate the group’s three-year anniversary and the day the state certified them as a nonprofit organization on March 31, 2004.



Photo by Tristan Spinski / Daily News

Elise Mulholland, 7, left, of Indianapolis, Ind., smiles as she reads to her mother, Keira Amstutz, at the South County Regional Library in Estero on Thursday afternoon. The Friends of the South County Regional Library raised \$18,000 for programs and equipment at the facility. The group will conduct its final book sale of the season Saturday from 9 a.m. until 4 p.m. at the library.

Signs of the group’s presence are felt through the library, including a book shelf that sells titles based on an honor system and bring in about \$200 a week and a total of \$9,000 last year.

They sell tote bags and hawk children’s T-shirts. You name it and they’ve most likely slapped the “Friends of the Library” logo on it and put it up for sale to bring in more funds to the 10-year-old library branch on Three Oaks Parkway.

The newsletter the Friends of the Library group puts out was declared the second best in the state by Florida Library Association, which “is pretty good,” Hauenstein said. The group plans to release a cookbook in the fall, as well hire a local artist to paint a mural in the children’s section of the library.

They have already set aside \$20,000 for an expansion of the branch, anticipating the growth the region will inevitable undergo in the future serving patrons throughout south Lee County, said Hauenstein, a retired purchasing executive with the Xerox Corp. who brings her financial expertise to the group.

“We’re much more aggressive in our fundraising,” she said.

The Friends of the South County Regional Library will begin its book sale at 9 a.m. at the library branch, is 21100 Three Oaks Parkway. For more information visit: <http://friendsofscrl.org/>

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