



Spring 1999

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the dean's corner

DACUS LIBRARY / WINTHROP UNIVERSITY / SPRING 1999 / NUMBER 8

Our Friends

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As I close the book on my eight years at Winthrop, I've been thinking about our friends. That is not the royal "our," since my good personal friends have been without exception equally close friends of the library and its program. They are good people. . .indeed, the kind of people that will always make Winthrop especially memorable for me among the half dozen institutions where I've worked over the past thirty-five years.

The man who hired me, Al Lyles, was and still is representative of Winthrop at its best. Possessed of a quiet dignity, clear ideas of right and wrong, and a genius for solving problems behind the scenes, Al played a pivotal role in making the Friends of the Library a reality. He simply stuck at it until some of us who were a little slower caught up with him. Of course, none of this was new for Al. For years he had been one of the library's most generous supporters and as was his wish he did it anonymously until we

insisted on using his example to attract other gifts.

From the day I set foot on campus, Ross Webb has been a friend and mentor to me. His wide and deep knowledge of the university, its past and present, saved me from a number of pitfalls and extracted me from others that I at times stumbled into. Ross has contributed much to our library and especially to our important archival collections. But for all his many contributions, I value most his friendship, good conversation, and wise counsel.

Dot Medlin and Louise Pettus have also been good friends. Dot, as is generally acknowledged, has done more than any other single individual to keep our Friends group flourishing. She is truly a testimonial to the difference an individual can make. Louise has brought to us her valuable experience in working with other successful Friends groups as well as her unrivaled knowledge of Rock Hill and York County history. It is a plea-

sure to work with both ladies.

Support can take many forms and there is no one whose good spirits and judgment I value more than those of retired history professor, Fred Heath. When he was on the faculty he was the departmental liaison par excellence setting an extraordinarily high standard for what a faculty library representative should be. Now in retirement, his interest in reading, in the conundrums of history, and in the library program are just as keen and lively as ever.

I suppose it is no surprise that all these "retired" friends are humanists. . .and, yes, I do consider history, along with literature, to be one of the humanities. Alas, if we only had more such people teaching the humanities would never have fallen to the sadly politicized and feeble niche that they occupy today at all too many colleges and universities.

So, yes, these are our Friends. . .there are many, many others. I have mentioned only a few who have helped to raise

many thousands of dollars for the library and once again have set ambitious goals for the year ahead.

Still, there is one more friend of many years standing I want to name and that is the book itself. I began this essay with perhaps the ill chosen metaphor of “closing the book.” I am still an unashamed and unabashed champion of the book. In the day of the Internet, CD Roms, and the virtual library, some find this anachronistic. I still believe that reading is at the heart of real librarianship.

The late Archibald Rutledge, one of South Carolina’s wisest

writers, put it well when he wrote in *The Beauty of the Night*:

While invention and discovery constantly widen our horizons and advance our civilization, in so far as the human heart is concerned nothing new is ever discovered. This is because all was discovered long ago. Nothing human is new. It may, indeed, seem new to one who has not been led by literature and history through the past. Reading enables us to anticipate all the experiences of life, indeed, to live them even if

they shall never be ours. Perhaps the greatest advantage afforded the reader of good literature is not mere pleasure, as is usually supposed, but rather the pre-discovery of life.

So I am happy to add the “book” to my list of friends. If the book remains at the heart of what we do as librarians, we will never lack for the kind of good friends this essay celebrates. And a library blessed with such friends need have no fear of the future.

Paul Z. DuBois
Dean of Library Services

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