

## Chapter 2

# Waking Up the Neighborhood: Partnerships with Local Businesses and Art Communities

**Catherine Hakala-Ausperk**  
*Northeast Ohio Regional Library System, USA*

### ABSTRACT

*With competition for customers, funding, and success at a premium these days, libraries must find ways to throw in their lot with neighboring organizations and businesses in order to best serve their shared constituencies. This chapter examines success stories born from collaborations showing that all libraries can share in this type of success—no matter how big or little their community may be—and partner with local companies, businesses, social, and non-profits groups in ways that are not only cost-effective, but can also result in innovative revenue streams for all parties involved.*

### INTRODUCTION

Success stories, at least at Ohio's Cleveland Heights–University Heights Library (CHUHL), always involve community partners and library staff members working together to bring innovative service to its customers. Consider these three examples: burgers were only \$5 at the local Whole Foods store one summer day in 2010, when proceeds from their summer “Giving Grill” event all went to support the Friends of the Library foundation; baby showers, sometimes held simultaneously with wedding showers, are frequent Saturday

afternoon activities in the library's meeting rooms. And “Hot Nosh,” the name of a vending machine that offers such delicacies as pizza and knishes, available next to history texts and biographies, with our vendor sharing a portion of the profit with us. Throughout our building, food and drink can be enjoyed in any spot our users select. CHUHL has become *the* place where its residents meet and make good use of their community's central meeting space—the library.

As this chapter will show, CHUHL has engaged in numerous other community partnerships and celebrations that have helped support its technol-

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ogy and programming. It will outline successful, joint ventures from social events and parties to gallery showing and food sales, all of which contributed to improved services for library patrons and, often, financial and marketing benefits for local businesses and organizations. The objective of this chapter is twofold: to provide an overview of CHUHL's community focused that have helped ensure the library's financial well-being and to provide recommendations to other libraries around the country looking to find similar success. With little money, fewer staff and more competition of the customers' time and support, all libraries need to engage in such activities to ensure their own livelihood.

## **LOCAL BUSINESSES**

All businesses want the same thing—a stable financial future. Small, local businesses like retail and grocery stores often wait on the same customers many of us see every day within the walls of our libraries. In fact, our visitor counts sometimes far outpace what might be recorded in a nearby grocery store. This begs the questions: Why would libraries not want to help that business neighbor by offering low-cost, targeted advertising of their services to its patrons? Why not form a partnership that helps both sides attract more traffic and revenue. Profit is no longer a four-letter word in library circles. Failure is. That's why CHUHL has openly courted, negotiated and profited alongside its business neighbors over the past few years and, in the end, our shared customers have benefitted as well. What follows are some examples of how CHUH reached out to its community to the benefit of all parties involved.

### **Grocery Stores**

Grocery stores see many of the same people we see in libraries and usually almost as often. Because of that shared familiarity, a Branch Manager and

her staff decided in 2010 to ask one large, local store if they'd be willing to enhance our Morning Seniors' program by providing coffee and sweet rolls. We would in turn post a "thank you" note for all to see. The management of the grocery store agreed, asking if we could help them out by sending a librarian over to occupy children with stories while their parents attended an in-store cooking class. We also agreed, and a wonderful partnership was born that continues still and promises to grow! As University Heights Branch Manager Aurora Martinez explains, "Whole Foods is a different kind of business; their mission is not only to make a profit but also to be an agent for change and for improvement of the well-being of their customers and their community. Apart from the profit-seeking, their mission has a lot in common with that of the public library, and this has made for a successful relationship with many opportunities to collaborate. From babies to seniors, the library has teamed up with Whole Foods to present a wide variety of programs at their store, and in turn, we've welcomed the store staff to use our library meeting rooms free of charge for training and meetings. It's such an advantage for both organizations when customers see us working together for their benefit, and certainly our common hope is to win the continued support of our community. And it's always exciting to dream up new ways we can join forces to share our resources and services as trends come and go and community needs change."

Since then, we haven't run out of great ideas for enhancing each other's business. Another partnership we're planning to implement with the same grocery store we hope will involve canvas book/grocery recyclable bags—something both businesses need and use extensively. The library plans to ask them to help pay for a bulk purchase of bags with our logo on one side and theirs on the other. We would have them available for customers to use when visiting our respective places of business and, as our shared customers carry these bags around the city, both businesses

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