



In a day when everyone is overbooked with extracurricular activities, it's rare to see an auxiliary group thriving the way the Friends of the Whitehall Public Library is. The group will be celebrating their 50th anniversary this year, and, despite five decades of service under their belts, they still have a full agenda and plenty more to give. Faustino Dunckhorst, president of Friends of the Whitehall Public Library, said this year's anniversary is two-fold.

"The friends group got together and, in essence, made the creation of the library happen, and we're still in existence," he said. "And then there was a two-year period of activity going from the bookmobile in Caste Village in 1961 up to the dedication of the library in 1963."

"Right after I became involved, the library made a major addition, including the room there now that has a fireplace. That was in 1998," Dunckhorst said. "I've been mainly involved in advocating for the state funding. That's been a rollercoaster over these 10 or 12 years. We've been very fortunate that the borough has been extremely supportive.

When the state cut their contribution, the borough made up dollar for dollar what the state cut, so we didn't have to make up with staff cuts or book purchases. The county contribution has been fairly constant. That comes as part of the RAD 1 percent Allegheny sales tax. Since it comes out of the sales tax receipts, it has been pretty stable and constant."

Paula Kelly, executive director of the Whitehall Public Library, said the Friends have been consistently supporting the library and its mission, providing much needed donations to keep the wheels turning smoothly.

"They are responsible for the library being here at all," she said. "They have consistently

fundraised for us over the course of the past 50 years, and their donations are very significant. Once a year they present the library with a check anywhere from \$10,000 to \$15,000, depending on how successful the campaign has been. That is allocated to our summer reading program and our LEARN bus."

The LEARN bus, is a unique program for the library in that it targets recent non-native U.S. citizens and introduces them to the library.

Because of their tandem efforts, the Whitehall Public Library is ranked in the top 25 for its size nationwide.

This fall, the Friends will celebrate their official anniversary, and in May of 2013, they will celebrate the library's dedication. The Friends are working on booking the South Hills Country Club and finding entertainment for the event.

"I find it fascinating that when you look like communities like Robinson Township, which just recently built a library, to see how far we've come," he said. "We started with only one staff person. Everything else was done by volunteers."

* For more information on the Whitehall Public Library, go to www.whitehallpubliclibrary.org

Reproduced (with editor's permission) from *IN Brentwood-Baldwin-Whitehall*, Spring 2011 issue (p. 60).