Submitted

When Eunice Friedman retired from her position as Vice President of the Friends of the Hudson Library this November, she capped off nearly a half century of volunteer service to the group. “It’s not only space aces who have the right stuff,” said Friends President Lynn Remly. “Any person as dedicated to a cause as Eunice is can make a big difference.”

Friedman’s service started in 1979, when she worked sorting books and setting up sales at the old Hudson library on Aurora Street. In those distant times, the Friends were happy to bring in $100 a month at biweekly sales in a tiny basement room, cramped among stacks of hardbacks and pocketbooks, trying to control a flow of buyers.

Fast forward to 2022, when the Friends’ sales produced $35,000 to be donated to the library. Today, thrice-weekly book sales in a larger space are supplemented by online Amazon sales, an unheard-of technology in the 1970s that has brought in $20,000 from far beyond Hudson just since 2019.

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Friedman

Library director Leslie Polott recalls meeting Friedman in 1996, when she herself took up her new duties. “It was almost magic, the way she recruited people to volunteer,” Polott said.

While the number of volunteers has fallen from around 50 to 30, the attraction of selling and talking about books will always draw book lovers to the sales.

“Something interesting is always happening,” Friedman said. “It may just be selling a weird book you thought you’d never get rid of. More often, it’s the people you meet, whom you might see for years and years.”

Hudson Library and Historical Society SUBMITTED

Friedman

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year, men and women donate hundreds and even thousands of hours to the library, all in order to maintain the quality of library services. COVID tested the resolve of volunteers working to keep Friends sales up and running, and the volunteers prevailed.

Library director Leslie Polott recalls meeting Friedman in 1996, when she herself took up her new duties.
“I went to the Friends meeting to get an idea of their operation,” she says. “Eunice was there, already involved in sorting, selling, setting up programs, and just about everything else. She was immensely active in the Friends’ efforts.”

Among other things, Friedman set up the group’s highly popular book-and-author luncheons, generally held at local country clubs, featuring authors like Les Roberts. “These became the ‘thing to do’ in Hudson in the 90s,” Polott remembers, and all the profit from the meetings went to the library.

Despite the success of other activities, Polott always believed that the space in the new library, though still small, could handle more traffic. “I was constantly beating the drum to have more sales, to churn the collection,” she says. “Eunice was instrumental in establishing first a regular biweekly sale and then nine sales a month, including weekday afternoons. It gave us a big boost.” She continued to staff the sales when the number grew even more.

Staffing the sales involved recruiting and frequent telephoning to ensure that volunteers were clear on dates and times. Friedman inevitably compares staffing efforts to herding cats, particularly after COVID thinned the ranks of volunteers. After COVID appeared, a lot of people had concerns about working in such a close environment.

“It’s always been difficult to get people to commit to even a small slot of time,” Friedman says. “In the past, regular bookstore patrons would ask how they could get involved, and I’d do my best to bring them in, but fewer people are interested now.”

Over time, Friedman recalls, the Friends received “expert opinion” on how to increase the number of volunteers, but “It never worked.” More often, she managed to engage someone who volunteered with her at another event, such as the Ice Cream Social or the annual blood drive.

“These are ‘old school’ types,” Friedman feels. “They are firmly committed to volunteering and are looking for ways to do good things for the community.”

Over time, for example, she sold books to a young unmarried woman—and much later to the woman’s husband and children.

Though she has always been an intensely private person, Friedman has worked to help everyone on a personal basis as well.

“She was very helpful to me when I was choosing a school for my older daughter Libby,’ said one patron. ’Her thoughts and opinions on Laurel School, for example, led me to enroll Libby there, where she was very happy.’

Friedman decided that almost a half century was probably enough and opted to retire this year.

“I’ve enjoyed it, but there’s a time for everything.” As a lifelong reader, her visits to the library will continue, but only to socialize and pick up her own volumes.

On Nov. 10, the Friends of the Hudson Library honored Friedman’s service by presenting her with a personal gift and establishing a $1,000 annual grant to the library in her name.

The Eunice Friedman Program Series will be used to fund adult programming, with an emphasis on gardening and health, two of her interests.

“I’m very happy for her, of course,” Polott said, “but her going leaves a void. She was a force, a fixture. It’s the changing of the guard of course, but she will be hard to replace.”

Even as new technology changes the nature of volunteer work, the goal is the same: To serve. Though Friedman appreciates her lovely parting gifts, she never sought thanks or recognition. In true “old school” fashion, she summarizes, “I don’t want to get anything. I volunteer to give.”