

The Friends

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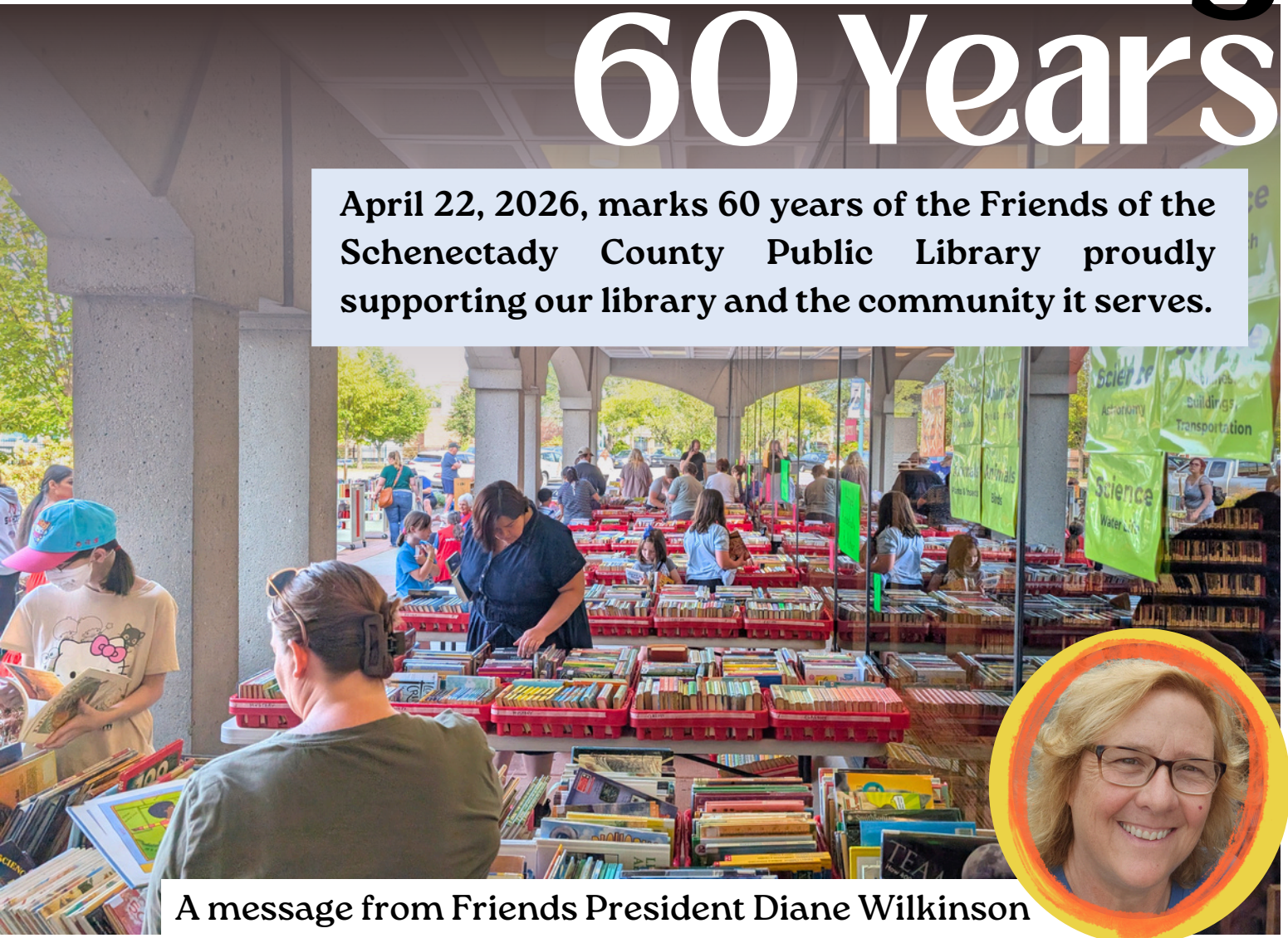
Anniversary Celebration



The Friends of Schenectady
County Public Library
10-Year Retrospective, 2016-2026

Celebrating 60 Years

April 22, 2026, marks 60 years of the Friends of the Schenectady County Public Library proudly supporting our library and the community it serves.



A message from Friends President Diane Wilkinson

This Decade Report reflects on the remarkable progress made over the past ten years. From the success of our bookstores, to our thriving book sales and growing online presence, the Friends continue to expand how we support the library. Equally important are the programs that bring our community together. The Friends support engaging library and community programming including author talks and special events that create opportunities for learning, creativity, and connection. Through our Friends Travel program, members also explore the world together.

Our commitment extends outward through scholarships for local high school seniors, community outreach efforts that place books in the hands of those who need them most, and the growing Junior Friends program that inspires the next generation of library supporters.

These achievements are made possible by the dedication and generosity of our volunteers and members. For six decades, the Friends have worked together to create a stronger Schenectady community, one book and one library program at a time. Together, we celebrate the past decade of impact and look forward with excitement to the years ahead.

Financial Impact Through the Years

Over the past decade, the Friends have invested over \$1.3M in library-related initiatives.

The bulk of these funds (\$647,000) supported programming and engagement. This highlights a strong, consistent commitment to providing enriching, accessible experiences for patrons of all ages, underscoring the organization's focus on lifelong learning and community connection.

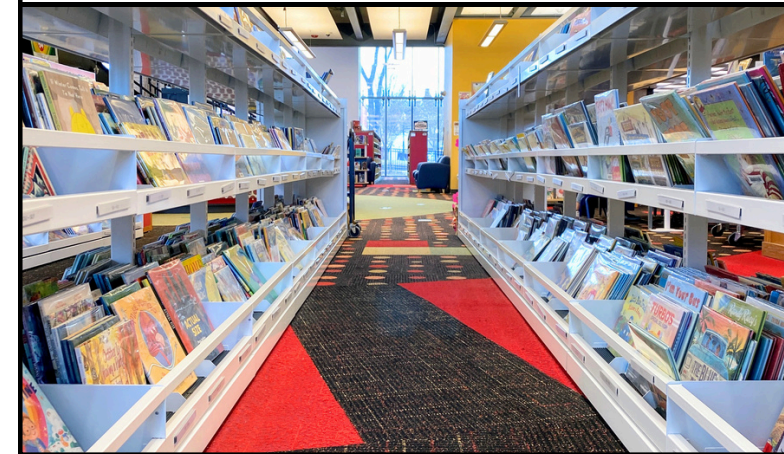
Investments in capital equipment and branch support, totaling nearly \$260,000, went toward maintaining and enhancing library spaces, ensuring they remain welcoming, functional, and up-to-date.

Other important areas of support include staff development (\$54,324), publicity and outreach (\$46,014), and technology support (\$19,629), all of which contribute to the library's ability to evolve and respond to community needs.

Overall, this ten-year spending profile reflects a balanced approach, prioritizing programs and services while also investing in infrastructure, staff, and innovation, ensuring the library continues to serve as a vibrant, essential resource for the community.

Picture Book Browse Bins

The Children's section at the Hon. Karen B. Johnson Main Library benefited from upgraded browse bins in October 2025, thanks in part to **\$36,000 in funding** provided by the Friends. The new shelves make it easier for children to see the books, showcasing their artwork to better engage children and families in selecting, reading, and borrowing books.



Schenectady Takes Action for Reading Success (STARS)

STARS is an action campaign that aims to spread free and diverse children's books throughout Schenectady County while motivating parents and caregivers to talk, read, and sing more with their young children from birth. STARS has distributed over 46,000 books/kits from 2017-2025 through generous funding from organizations including the Friends, Schenectady Co. Public Library, Schenectady Co. Public Health Services, Northern Rivers, Ellis Medicine, Schenectady City School District, Schenectady Co. OCFS, and Sycamore Collaborative. **Total support from the Friends over the past 10 years totals over \$95,000.**

Funding Highlights



Museum Pass Program

The Museum Pass Program provides Schenectady County Public Library cardholders with free or deeply discounted admission to an array of participating museums, historical sites, and cultural institutions across the region. The program helps remove financial barriers and makes it easier for Schenectady families and individuals to experience these enriching educational and cultural experiences. **The Friends have provided about \$40,000 to support this program since 2016.**



Getting Books Into Peoples' Hands



I've always loved books, but what I love even more is placing the right book into a child's hands and watching that spark ignite. Knowing I might be helping create a lifelong reader... that's the real joy of being part of the Friends.

– Sylvia Curley

The Friends efforts to get books into the hands of as many members of our community as possible starts with the **generosity of community members**. Thanks to individuals who bring in donations to the library's loading dock, Friends volunteers can direct materials where they will be most useful — high-value items are set aside for online sales, others for the book stores, book sales, and community donations. **Along each step of this process, volunteers contribute countless hours** preparing books and materials for purchase. At the stores, volunteers work together to organize books, assist customers, and provide checkout service for visitors who have found a special title or item. Hundreds of volunteers support our three annual book sales, helping with setup, organization, cashiering, and cleanup.

Library Book Sales: A Community Tradition

For years, the Friends Book Sales have been a staple of the Schenectady community, earning a reputation as one of the best in the region. Thanks to the generosity of community members who donate gently used adult fiction and nonfiction, children's and young adult books, as well as DVDs, CDs, audiobooks, and vinyl records, there is truly something for everyone — which keeps patrons returning and new visitors discovering us each season. **This translates into thousands of dollars to support Library programming after every sale.**

The success of these sales relies heavily on our volunteers, led by Lisa Esperti and Robin Eddy. **Each sale engages nearly 100 individuals.** We are fortunate to have strong community support from MVP, Union College, and local high schools. **Dedication, devotion and commitment. These words describe our book sale team exactly.** All the many hours and hard work pay off every time we have a sale.

"The thing that strikes me the most is the dedication and reliability of our volunteers."
– Val Catlin

"The Friends organization is a positive and inclusive group of individuals who are deeply committed to strengthening literacy and creating an engaged community by supporting library services and programs."
– Crystal Hoey

A Decade of Growth and Resilience at the Friends Bookstores

Over the past ten years, the Friends' bookstores have experienced exciting growth and transformation. In 2019, the Friends expanded their reach by opening a second bookstore, A Second Look, at VIA | Port Rotterdam. This milestone marked a significant step forward in increasing both visibility and fundraising capacity.

Building on that momentum, in April 2022, The Whitney relocated to a larger, more prominent space directly across from the library. Both the Grand Opening of A Second Look and the Grand Reopening of The Whitney were met with strong community support and enthusiastic attendance, reflecting the deep connection between the Friends, their bookstores, and the community they serve. Together, **these milestones highlight a decade of growth, community generosity, and an enduring commitment to getting books into the hands of readers.**

The Whitney and A Second Look, have become an increasingly important and resilient source of revenue for the organization. Financial trends over the past several years show strong growth leading up to 2019, when the addition of A Second Look helped drive gross sales to over \$104,000 and net sales above \$93,000. Like many community-based operations, the bookstores experienced a significant decline during the COVID-19 pandemic, with 2020 gross sales dropping to approximately \$46,800. However, what stands out is the steady and determined recovery that followed. Each subsequent year reflects gradual growth, with both gross and net sales climbing consistently as operations stabilized and community engagement returned.

By 2025, sales have nearly rebounded to pre-pandemic highs, reaching over \$105,000 in gross sales and nearly \$92,000 in net sales. This recovery not only highlights the adaptability of the Friends organization but also underscores the continued community support for the bookstores.

Overall, the data tells a story of expansion, disruption, and resilience, demonstrating that the Friends' bookstores remain a vital and growing contributor to funding library programs and services.

350,000+
books sold
2016-2026



The Friends bookstores have certainly become more than just places to buy books. They have helped the Friends show that they support the activities of our community.
– Robin Eddy



Major Happenings From the Past 10 Years

Volunteers make it all possible!

2020-2021

The COVID pandemic had a huge impact on the Friends — libraries were closed, events were cancelled, and our membership dropped from over 1200 (in 2016) to fewer than 400 individuals. However, our work never really stopped, and by 2021 our book sales were back and we began to rebound. Our goal is to surpass our 2016 membership level and we are well on our way! As of the end of 2025, there are 1,108 active Friends members.



2024



The Whitney begins a collaboration with Oakroom Artists to display work by local artists • Scholarship Fund established, awarding \$1,000 scholarships to one student from each Schenectady County high school annually

The Friends 60th Anniversary!

April 22, 2026

2016



The Friends provide funding to help establish the Phyllis Bornt Branch Library & Literacy Center

2022

The Whitney Book Corner moves to 105 Clinton Street • The Friends implement Little Green Light, a new database/CRM system



2018



The Whitney adopts a digital POS system.

2017



A Second Look opens at VIA | Port Rotterdam

2019



Community Outreach Committee formed • The Friends are recognized with a "Good News" Award from the Chamber of Schenectady County

2023



Innaugural Alice Reed Author Talk, featuring Pulitzer Prize winner Elizabeth Strout. Through her generous bequest, Alice made it possible for the Friends to establish this author event series, which we hope will honor her legacy by continuing to bring meaningful literary experiences to the community for many years to come.

2025

Program Highlights



Pictured: Junior Friends Jesse Angrist and Amelie Knox organized a book drive at Niskayuna High School to collect young adult and early reader books to stock the shelves at The Whitney Book Corner and A Second Look Bookstore.

Junior Friends

After being rebooted in 2024, the Junior Friends program now has over 90 students, age 11-18, as members. You can find a Junior Friend at most Friends events, including volunteering at book sales, the bookstores, Comic-Con, Beat the Snow concerts, and more. They also volunteer at many children's library programs, assisting with summer reading prizes and children's book week, among others.

In addition to supporting Friends events, the Junior Friends have also worked to create opportunities for their own impact. These include an all-student run homework help program, free wrapping services during the holidays, decorating the Whitney Book Corner for the holidays, and a drop in craft event at the library in the spring. A Junior Friend is represented on the library's strategic planning committee and another teen runs the Junior Friend Instagram page (@juniorfriendsofscpl).

The Junior Friends are dedicated to championing the Friends and SCPL and the vital programs and services they provide to our community.

Over 5,000 Books Donated to Community Organizations Since 2023

The Community Outreach Committee was formed in late 2023, with the mission of extending literacy resources to organizations in need. Through the "Building Libraries Through Outreach" initiative, the Committee has supported nursing homes, hospitals, senior centers, schools, Boys & Girls Club programs, the Schenectady County Jail, and more.

The Committee continues to network and build connections throughout the community, sharing in the spirit of giving and working to make a meaningful difference for residents of Schenectady County.

Seeing the World With The Friends

The Friends Travel Trips program began again in 2015 when Sue Crawford and Gail Denisoff responded to a request in the Friends newsletter to organize day trips for members. Building on the earlier work of the late Lisa Holt of the Schenectady County Public Library, the program quickly grew into a popular offering. Since the first trip in 2016 to the John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum and the Edward M. Kennedy Institute for the United States Senate in Boston, the Friends have organized spring and fall day trips to cultural destinations across the region. In 2017, the program expanded through a partnership with Collette to include longer group travel experiences, beginning with a trip to the Canadian Rockies and continuing with memorable journeys to destinations around the world. The program offers both local excursions and international adventures, bringing together a loyal group of travelers while continuing to welcome new Friends members along the way.

Pictured, top to bottom: A stop during the 2025 "Christmas on the Danube" river cruise; A visit to Claude Monet's home and gardens in Giverny, France; Posing with a telephone box turned little free library in England during the 2024 WWII Memorials Trip; Christmas shopping in Europe.

"The Friends are at the heart of SCPL. Whenever I go to a library program and see that it was sponsored by the Friends, it reminds me of our impact. We support the library and its patrons in so many ways; from children's story times to concerts, from craft times to financial literacy. There is a program for everyone and I love that we are part of making it happen!" – Maria Norelli



Beat the Snow Concert Series

The popular Beat the Snow Concert series began in 2010 when local musicians Ron Patrick and Chris Patrick presented a winter concert that quickly grew into a seasonal tradition. Since 2015, Janice Walz has organized the series over each winter at the Karen B. Johnson Central Library. Thanks to sponsorship by the Friends, the concerts are free and open to the public. They bring high-quality entertainment to the community, featuring a wide variety of musical styles — from Broadway and classical vocals to jazz, Latin rhythms, and instrumental ensembles. The series showcases both longtime local performers and emerging young musicians, continuing its mission of brightening winter with music for all.

100+ Free Concerts
in the Beat the Snow Series
since 2016



The People Behind The Friends

“Our time as volunteers at ASL has been quite satisfying; we have met many people who come back over and over not just to get books but to say hello. The best part is seeing so many children get excited when they see the books that their parents are getting for them. Sweet eyes and happy faces make us smile.”

– Dr. Mikki (pictured) & Art Brassard



“The Friends have many ways of enhancing experiences with books. From book sales to being involved with the processes at the stores. We work tirelessly to provide current readings and programs for those patrons who may not be able to afford books.”

– Norrine Thopmson

Volunteers are the heart of our organization, making possible the exceptional level of fundraising that supports the Schenectady County Public Library and the broader community. From sorting book donations to stocking the shelves of The Whitney and A Second Look, to organizing the book sales, concerts, and other programs, Friends volunteers make everything we do possible. As an entirely volunteer-led organization, these dedicated individuals form the foundation of the Friends, enabling the organization to raise thousands of dollars each year in support of library programs, services, and the community as a whole.

“I have met some really great people while volunteering, even if I only see them once or twice a year at the book sales. They have kept me coming back” – Jessica McDonald

Volunteers at the 2025 fall book sale



David Leith, Mary Rosen, Deb Malek, Jessica McDonald; Janice Brownell, Crystal Hoey, Irene Turvey



Pictured, clockwise from top right: Mark Mattis transporting books to The Whitney; Laura Starrs, Sylvia Curley, and Arleen Cullen organizing children's book donations; Book sorting volunteers Joan Molloy, Crystal Hoey, Carol Shimkus, and Claudia Rolfe.

“I feel like I'm continuing my sister-in-law's legacy, both Pat Whitney and Lea Leonard were the ones who first introduced me to the Friends. What I love most are the people I've met and worked with along the way. We all share a love of books and take pride in getting them into the hands of the public through our bookstores and sales. The Friends truly are a wonderful group of people.” – Joan Molloy

Volunteer Team Spotlight: Online Sales

For years, the Friends Online team has played a vital role in transforming donated materials and library discards into meaningful support for the library. By carefully selecting the best items from incoming donations, the team focuses on selling collectible items such as signed and first editions, audiobooks, and other high-value items via Amazon and eBay. Today, the Friends maintain 100% seller ratings on both, reflecting the quality and care behind every sale.

Behind the scenes, **a dedicated group of 17 volunteers manages every step of the process.** From scanning items and researching their value, to posting listings, managing inventory, and shipping orders six days a week, their work ensures a smooth and efficient operation. **In 2025 alone, the team scanned over 70,000 items, maintained thousands of active listings, and fulfilled more than 2,300 shipments,** demonstrating both the scale and effectiveness of this effort.

The financial impact is significant. **In 2025, online sales generated approximately \$61,000 in gross revenue,** providing critical funding to support library programs, services, and community initiatives. Through the dedication of our volunteers and the generosity of donors, the Friends Online program continues to be a powerful example of how donated materials can be transformed into lasting community impact.

FRIENDS OF SCHENECTADY COUNTY PUBLIC LIBRARY DECADE REPORT | 2016-2026



The State of The Friends

At the beginning of the decade, the Friends had just over 1,200 active members. Following the onset of COVID, that number dropped to a low of 362 active members. In the Spring of 2025, a strategic membership campaign was launched to rebuild and strengthen our membership base. Thanks to the implementation of several key strategies (notably member discounts in our stores), the Friends closed out 2025 with over 1,100 active members, marking a remarkable recovery and renewed community engagement. Looking ahead, we anticipate surpassing our earlier benchmark of 1,200 members by the end of 2026.

This renewed growth represents more than numbers. A stronger membership base allows the Friends to provide increased financial support to the Library, expand programs, enhance collections, and invest in initiatives that directly benefit our community. **Friends members are people who believe in literacy, lifelong learning, and access to resources for all. Together, we are strengthening the Library and making a meaningful difference in our community.**

Member Benefits

- 25% discount at our bookstores
- One FREE book on your birthday
- Annual membership dinner
- And more!

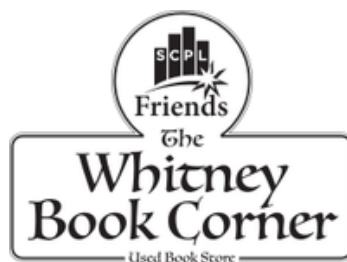


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