



MARCH 2026

FOCUS ON FRIENDS

PRESIDENT'S LETTER

New Website, Services and Events. Check Them Out.

You're probably getting tired of us talking about our updated website, right? I understand. It's a bit like having to endure someone walking you through their family Hawaiian vacation photos while you stare at two feet of snow outside your window.

But, marketers much wiser than I say that you need to repeat a message many times before it sticks. So, please bear with me as I do my best to encourage you to check out the site's new features, if you haven't yet.

The **Feedback Forum** is your own market research tool that lets you ask other Friends groups to share how they do something or to share their opinion. **Friendeavors** is your own news page where you can share feel-good and useful stories about your group's events and achievements. **Consult-A-Friend** lets you consult with the FOML board to simply get an answer or develop a strategic plan for your group. And, of course, the Member's Manual is an old standby that is loaded with useful information.

There's a brief article in this issue that tells you about our new membership renewal system. Admittedly, the storyline isn't particularly spellbinding, and the plot is fairly superficial. But, check it out if you have encountered any challenges in renewing your membership or haven't done so yet.

You'll also find information in this issue about our upcoming **Annual Membership Meeting** on April 10, where we'll be trying something new with a panel discussion segment. And, it's not too soon to make plans to enjoy spring in West Michigan at our May 8 **"Talk About Friends"** workshop.

See, we are doing some things beyond our new website. And, we hope you can join us at the events to share what your group has been up to and to connect with other Friends from around the state.



HIGHLIGHTS

NAVIGATING
MEMBERSHIP
RENEWAL

ONLINE SELLING

UPCOMING EVENTS

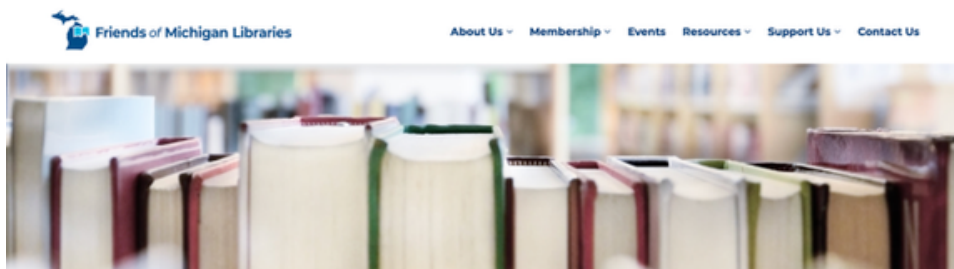
FRIENDEAVORS

AWARD WINNERS

Navigating Our New Renewal System.

This article probably isn't for everybody, especially if you have already successfully created a new password, logged into our new website, and renewed your membership. But, if you haven't done so yet, let's take a minute to go over a few facts about our new membership system that could, at least, reduce potential confusion as you transition from the old to the new. You know, "A stitch in time..."

- **Create Your Password:** If you haven't already done so, you will need to create a password for your FOML account by clicking on "Log in" in the top right corner of our website's home page and then clicking on "Forgot Password." Your Login ID is the email address you have associated with your account (it will carry over from the old system).



- **Term of Membership:** Your membership no longer runs from January 1 through December 31. Now, it begins on your payment date and runs for 12 months. So, if you paid for your membership on March 23, 2025, it will be due for renewal on March 23, 2026.
- **Your Next Payment Date:** If you want to know your next payment date or have questions, just email friendsofmichiganlibraries@gmail.com and we will let you know.
- **Reminder:** You will get a reminder 30 days before your membership expires. That will allow you to get approval from your Friends board if necessary.
- **Renew Anytime:** If you don't need approval and want to renew right away, go ahead. Your membership will be extended one year from the date of your payment last year.
- **Lapsed Membership:** If you haven't renewed by your payment due date, you will get an email reminder to renew. If you do not, your account will be put on hold until payment is received, which means you would not be able to access the "members-only" content on the website.

Hope that wasn't too painful. Please don't hesitate to reach out to us if you run into any glitches. Sometimes, it's simply a misplaced space in a password. But, often, it can take a little more research on our part. We're happy to help, either way.

Online Selling – Part 2: Tips for Getting Organized

Editor's Note: Selling used books online isn't for everyone. But, if you're committed to giving it a go, what's the best way to organize for success? In our last issue, we took a quick look at some of the factors to consider if you're thinking about starting an online operation. In this issue we will visit how one successful Friends group in West Michigan has organized its volunteers and processes to grow annual online sales to more than \$50,000.



The answer to many of life's questions is, "It depends." And, that is certainly the case when it comes to deciding how to organize your team to sell online. There are a number of functions that need to be performed. In small operations, those functions may be handled by 1-3 volunteers. But, in larger operations, you will need multiple people for each role to operate efficiently and effectively. The primary jobs/roles include:

- **Online Sales Chairperson:** Someone needs to be in charge to ensure that procedures are being followed, to make decisions, handle complaints and communications, etc.
 - Tip 1: Avoid micro-managers. Volunteers don't need the aggravation of someone constantly looking over their shoulders, especially without cause. But, service excellence is critical. So, you need to find the right balance of supervision and freedom.
 - Tip 2: Avoid arguing with customers. Sometimes, there will be a misunderstanding ("I thought you said the book was signed.") Generally, it's best to simply apologize for the misunderstanding and agree to refund the money. (Unless it's a valuable book, it's probably not going to be worth it to have them return it at your expense.)
 - Tip 3: To avoid fraud, it's a good idea to keep a log of customers who ask for a refund to see if there's a pattern that needs to be addressed (i.e., to either bar a fraudster or train a volunteer who is making chronic errors).
 - Tip 4: Often, reports are available from the platform you are selling on (eBay has excellent reporting) regarding the number of sales, revenues and variable expenses. But, you may want to implement a manual method for keeping track of which specific books have sold.

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Online Selling - Part 2 (Continued)

- **Book Sorters:** These are the folks who are charged with identifying books that might have enough appeal to sell online. They need to be given guidelines, loads of training, and the mandate to err on the side of giving too many books to the researchers (you will be astounded at the variety of topics that will sell online).
 - Tip 5: Give them a lot of positive feedback when they correctly pass along a book that has significant online value. The success of online sales starts with the Sorters. So, let them know they are valued.
- **Researchers:** Someone will need to check out other book-selling sites to determine if a book has potential value to buyers. This is more of an art than a science. So, researchers tend to improve with experience.
 - Tip 6: It's helpful to see how many of the same book are already listed on the site you'll be listing on. But, it's much more helpful and useful in pricing to see if any have sold recently and for how much.
 - Tip 7: When you're just getting started, you have no track record (i.e., your brand is unknown). So, you might want to start out undercutting other similar books to encourage buyers to "take a chance" on you. Once you have an established presence, you can adjust your pricing strategy.
- **Photographers:** Post photos of the book from front and back, with samples of inside pages. Don't skimp on the photos.
 - Tip 8: If the book is damaged, show the damage in a photo. It builds credibility and transparency.
 - Tip 9: Make sure that the photos are clear. Blurred, dark photos won't help sell the book. The photos are very influential in the decision-making process for buyers. Make sure they do the book justice.
- **Listers:** The easiest approach, operationally, is to choose one online platform you will list all your books on, even though some specialize in certain types of books. After considering their options, the West Michigan group decided to list on eBay since it had the broadest reach and an intuitive platform. (See the FOML membership manual for some other options.)
 - Tip 10: Part of the reason they chose eBay is that they have a large volume of books listed at all times (more than 1,000), which allowed them to establish an eBay store. Benefits of a store include no listing fee (you only pay a percentage when a book sells), no limits on the number of listings, and branding/marketing advantages. You will need to determine the best terms for your group based on the volume and types of books you have to offer.
 - Tip 11: Develop consistency in how you are listing items. This will require the creation of guidelines and standards if multiple people are doing your listing.
 - Tip 12: Include the key facts up front: Name of the book in all caps; indicate if it's a first edition and/or signed; author's name; the year of publication; and publisher (as space allows).
 - Tip 13: Always put in the ISBN if a field is provided because that auto-fills much of the relevant information about the book, including a description, which can save you a lot of time.
 - Tip 14: You will be asked about the condition of the book. Don't try to hide anything. Tell them if there is damage to the cover or spine; if the dust jacket is worn; if there's a coffee stain on page 225; etc. If they are unpleasantly surprised when they receive

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Online Selling – Part 2 (Continued)

the book, you will get bad reviews—which won't make you attractive to potential future customers—and could incur considerable expenses in return postage.

- Tip 15: It gets a little trickier when you are putting multiple books under one listing. But, experience shows that you can turn an unsellable single novel into a lucrative opportunity when you list all the books in a series together (e.g., Louise Penny's "Inspector Gamache" series). When you do this, you may need to list all the titles in the "Description" area since there is no other convenient way to do it.
- **Shippers**: These individuals must wrap, box, label and ship the books quickly after they are sold. Establish your service standards and ensure that all team members are committed.
 - Tip 16: If you are dealing in a large volume of listed books, ensure that you have a consistent and easy cataloguing system so that shippers can easily retrieve the books when they sell.
 - Tip 17: You should pack books securely, with ample padding. If your merchandise arrives in sloppy or damaged condition, you are going to have an unhappy customer, leading to poor satisfaction scores and a refund request (lost revenue, wasted time and damaged reputation).
 - Tip 18: You're going to need boxes of various sizes and packing materials. So, encourage all volunteers, library staff and relatives to start saving boxes for you. (You'll need someplace to store these boxes. If space is at a premium, you can flatten them and then reconstruct them when you need them. But, if you have adequate space, it's a lot easier to leave them intact.)
 - Tip 19: Buyers want their books quickly. You should mail in under two days from the time of purchase to ensure high quality scores, which impact the attractiveness of your company for future buyers.
 - Tip 20: This is the most deadline-driven function in the process. So, you need to ensure that you have a shipper identified to work each weekday so that there is no delay in getting the books sent. There is more flexibility in the other roles. So, those volunteers can be given more leeway to come in when convenient.

This is how one highly successful online selling team does it. If your group does things differently, please share them with us and we will pass the information along. The resources needed for your group to succeed will "depend" on a wide variety of factors. But, the steps in the process are relatively consistent for any size of operation.

COMING EVENTS

Annual Membership Meeting Set for April 10

The Friends of Michigan Libraries (FOML) will hold its Annual Membership Meeting on April 10 beginning at 9:30 am at the Delta Township District Library on the west side of Lansing. The event will feature a presentation titled “Unity: Moving Forward Together in Service” by Steven Bowers, executive director of The Library Network, which is the largest library cooperative in Michigan.

“This is a topic that always has relevancy for those of us who believe in working together to unite the Friends, libraries and communities they serve,” said Jill Sodt, FOML vice president. “And, many would say it has never been more relevant than it is today.”

The meeting will also feature a panel discussion on “How Library Directors and Friends Groups Manage Their Relationships,” according to Joe David, FOML president.

“We always put a high priority on encouraging member involvement at our events,” he said. “So, in addition to having a popular “Table Talk” session for attendees to share best practices and ideas, we will be hosting a panel discussion to allow members to ask questions about how to manage interactions with their libraries.”

The full agenda for the meeting follows:

- 9:00 – 9:30 am Registration
- 9:30 – 10:30 am Business Meeting (Election of board, year-end report, etc.)
- 10:30 – 10:40 am Group photo
- 10:40 – 11:00 am Break
- 11:00 – Noon Guest Speaker (Steven Bowers, The Library Network)
- Noon – 12:30 pm Lunch
- 12:30 – 12:45 pm Recognition of Merit Award Winners
- 12:45 – 1:45 pm Panel Discussion (“Building Bridges”)
- 1:45 – 2:15 pm Break
- 2:15 – 3:15 pm Table Talk
- 3:15 – 3:30 pm Closing and Evaluation Forms

David said that attendance at this year’s meeting will be limited to in-person participation. “We had such poor luck trying to include remote participants via Zoom, and it has been frustrating and non-productive for them,” he explained. “So, we’re hoping that, by keeping the meeting in the center of the state, members will be able to commute to attend in person.”

To register to attend the annual meeting, [click here](#).



‘Talk About Friends’ May 8 in West Michigan

Another date to add to your calendar for spring is the “Talk About Friends” workshop that will be held at the newly renovated Cascade Branch of the Kent District Library System near Grand Rapids on May 8.

The workshop will kick off at 9:30 am with a guest speaker and then invite participants to join in two separate “Table Talk” sessions with other Friends and FOML board representatives, ending at 12:30 pm.

“We’ll provide participants with some optional topics to discuss,” David said. “But, we certainly encourage them to come up with their own if there is something in particular they would like to discuss with other Friends groups.”

David, who is also president of the Friends of the Cascade Library, said that attendees might also enjoy touring the library grounds, both inside and out. “We have seen a lot of changes over the last couple of years, with the addition of a beautiful park outside the library and a major refresh of the inside facilities,” he said.

Registration information will be available on the FOML website in March.



The May 8 “Talk about Friends” workshop will be at the Cascade Branch of the Kent District Library in West Michigan.

Shelby Friends Host a No-Cost Annual Garden Event

Editor's Note: "Friendeavors" is something new. It's a hybrid word we came up with that combines "Friends" and "Endeavors" to create a page on our website where you can submit articles and photos about an event or accomplishment of your group's that might be something other Friends groups would want to emulate. We hope you will give it a try.

For several years, the Friends of Shelby Area District Library (SADL) have hosted a Garden Event outside in late May with no costs involved, very little planning, and only one Saturday morning for volunteers to help.

If your Library Friends group would like to offer something different to your community this spring, consider hosting a Free Plant Giveaway and Garden Sale. Visit our website (you will need to log in) to get more detailed information about the following four easy steps to get your event off the ground!



Step 1: Solicit items and plants

- Get the word out early to spur donations of flowers, plants and garden-related tools.
- Share the timetable and process for donating.

Step 2: Spread the word

- Advertise and promote the event with any medium you have: press releases, your newsletter, online posts, flyers.
- SADL has found the Saturday after Memorial Day, from 8 am until 11:00 am or until most items disappear, to work well.

Step 3: Set-up and Sale

- Set up tables outside covered in tarps
- Display all items on the tables or on the ground with donation jars prominently nearby.
- Have volunteers with "garden knowledge" circulate and help identify the plants, carry items to cars, and encourage donations.

Step 4: Clean up

- Cart any plants, pots, garden tools still remaining to the curb for free pick-up by any in the community who may have missed the sale.
- Wipe down the tarps, return tables to the library, and empty the donation jars. This fundraiser has earned over \$1,000 for Friends of SADL with only a few hours of volunteer time on a Saturday morning.

In addition to generating more than \$1,000 for the library, the community has become very invested in this participatory event, according to Cindy McKinnon, SADL president. "It's a great way to recruit new Friends members, too," she said. For additional information about this Garden Sale, contact Cindy at friendsofshelbyareadistrib@gmail.com.

GRANTS & AWARDS

Harriet Larson Grant Applications Due March 31.

If you have a Friends group that is newly forming, rejuvenating after inactivity, or implementing innovative approaches to membership growth and library advocacy, you might want to consider applying for FOML's Harriet Larson Founder's Grant to help defray your expenses.

FOML offers to two \$750 Founder's grants annually, with applications for the first award of 2026 due by March 31. To be eligible for consideration, your group must be a current FOML member, get library director approval, and submit your bylaws.

Applicants must also provide a concise two-page request detailing their group's history or formation plans, specific funding needs with itemized costs, and membership information. Find more information and the application on our [website](#).

The Friends of the Salem-South Lyon District Library won the Founder's award last March for their innovative approach to awarding a scholarship to a high school senior. Read about it on our website – Salem-South Lyon "[Imagine the Possibilities](#)" scholarship.

The Friends of the Hart Area Public Library won the second 2025 award last September for their plan to invigorate their group with a focus on the community.



2026 Merit Award Winners Announced

The Friends of Michigan Libraries (FOML) recently named The Friends of the Elk Rapids Library and The Friends of the Cadillac Wexford Public Library as the winners of the 2026 Merit Awards.

The Merit Awards celebrate the outstanding efforts of Friends groups that have made a significant impact on their library's services to the community, with each winner receiving a \$750 award, according to Joe David, FOML president.

“There are so many Friends groups in the state doing amazing work to support projects that will enhance their libraries’ ability to deliver quality programs and services to their communities,” he said. “And, the fact that many of them applied for this year’s Merit Awards didn’t make the selection process easy. But, we have two very deserving winners in Elk Rapids and Cadillac Wexler.”

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2026 Merit Award Winners Announced (Continued from previous page)

There are two categories of Merit Awards based on the size of the community the library is serving. The Elk Rapids Friends were winners in the “under 12,000” category based on its participation in the “Capitol Campaign” fundraising project for the new Elk Rapids Library.

“The Friends implemented a ‘Grassroots-to-Greatness’ communication strategy that involved more than 20 intimate community gatherings, hosted in Friends’ homes, to have informal conversations about the library’s future,” explained, Lauren Dake, Friends president.

In addition to the \$100,000 the Friends group donated directly, their efforts supported the raising of an additional \$1.02 million in donations and grants from more than 200 individual donors.

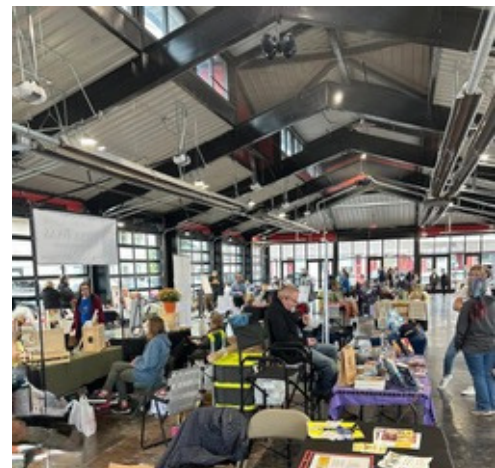
The Cadillac Wexford Friends, representing a community of more than 12,000, worked with their library’s staff to plan and implement, what has become, a one-day annual “Book Fest,” where community members have the opportunity to interact with more than 40 Michigan authors.

“The goal was to promote literacy while supporting Michigan writers,” explained Vicki Long, Friends president. “It allows attendees the opportunity to meet the authors, purchase books, and enjoy a literary event that is free to the public.”

FOML congratulates these two organizations and the others that applied for their creativity and commitment to their libraries and communities.



Intimate community gatherings were a key part of the Elk Rapids strategy.



Michigan authors are seen meeting with the community at “Book Fest.”

