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Group Momentum in the Gustavus Library Associates

Without the assistance of a solid friends group, many academic libraries cannot generate enough funding to meet the increasingly high standards expected of liberal arts institutions. An extensive yearly acquisitions program demands financial stability frequently lacking in the budgets of small liberal arts colleges, and when funds are low, the school libraries can generally expect to suffer. Friends groups can help to alleviate the financial strain generated when budget cuts and periods of economic lulls threaten to decrease the quality of services offered by the library, but a friends organization with a solid footing and consistent yearly support from its members and the community it represents will prove most beneficial to long-term library programs. Maintaining the level of momentum needed to carry out consistent programs often means looking beyond the group's primary financial goals for additional reinforcement of the group's identity. The Gustavus Library Associates, a friends group assisting a college library in rural Minnesota has developed a successful program of annual support that employs cultural and social activities to strengthen communal bonds and heighten enthusiasm for future fundraising activities.

In addition to the money allotted by the college, the Folke Bernadotte Memorial Library, on the campus of Gustavus Adolphus College, receives financial support from the Gustavus Library Associates. Since 1977, the GLA

has provided its members not only a means of supporting the library, but also a chance to be involved with campus activities. Each year the group offers a series of cultural and social events to bring the organization's members together and to attract new members. Supporting an academic library provides the cause for the GLA, but the activities maintain interest and enthusiasm for the organization's established goals. Most of the GLA's members are women who graduated from or have other significant ties to GAC. Combined with the intimate setting of the college in rural Minnesota, the yearly programs have generated enough spirited interest in the GLA to sustain itself as a viable group while growing and improving each year.

Folke Bernadotte Library serves the students and staff of Gustavus Adolphus College, but has traditionally extended its services beyond campus bounds to the broader St. Peter and Nicollet County community.

Approximately nine thousand people live in St. Peter, and its location 70 miles south of the Twin Cities places it in a thoroughly rural setting without causing substantial transportation problems to and from the urban center of Minneapolis and St. Paul. The college campus itself sits atop a hill overlooking the Minnesota River valley in which St. Peter lies. Though the college and the town in many ways rely on each other's presence, Gustavus has developed a nearly monastic quality not typically found in more urban colleges. Relative isolation of the students from the larger civic community necessitated the growth of the college's own social identity which most students carry over even after graduation.

In the early stages of development, the GLA membership centered itself within the St. Peter community while maintaining connections to people residing in the Twin Cities who had graduated from Gustavus or had other intimate ties to the college. As the organization grew, however, the

center of command for the Library Associates began to be shared between St. Peter and the Twin Cities. Students graduating from Gustavus frequently locate themselves in Minneapolis, St. Paul, and their suburbs where jobs are more prevalent. Over time the GLA found itself working out of two locations, St. Peter, and the Twin Cities. As the group expanded and required greater resources for its operations and activities, the locus shifted even further away from St. Peter, north to the cities.

The initiative for the establishment of the Gustavus Library Associates began during the spring of 1976. During meetings in March and April, a group of librarians at Gustavus arranged for the establishment of a friends group to provide financial support for Folke Bernadotte Library. The group drafted a series of bylaws for the organization, but it wasn't until the wife of the college's president at the time, Patricia Lindell, offered her support and leadership, that the Associates developed into a solid organization. Links were established with the college's development office, and on July 19, 1977, the first meeting of the board of the Gustavus Library Associates convened.

In the time between the initial planning sessions and the first board meeting, the group had already broadened its focus. The original stated purpose for forming the group was to support the library with financial contributions. While this remained the most vital reason for the GLA's existence, the group's leadership recognized the value of establishing a sense of belonging among group members to maintain a high level of interest in the organization and its cause. Responding to these needs the GLA established itself as a group offering not only financial support for the library, but a way for its members "to be involved in the activities of the Folke Bernadotte Memorial Library" through an annual "program of cultural events and continuing education." The GLA founders envisioned these

"activities" as forming the adhesive to reinforce the group's mission and propel it into future projects for the advancement of the library.

Another key player in producing valuable leadership and planning was Rhoda Lund. Rhoda Lund had been known throughout the Twin Cities as a successful fund-raiser with exceptional organizational skills. Lund's input,, together with Patty Lindell's leadership and experience with the University of Denver Women's Library Association undoubtedly behaved as catalysts in launching the initial phases of development. Lindell officially tied the fledgling organization to the college's development office to ensure the library of a cooperative and efficient fund raising effort, and provided valuable expertise on the functioning of friends of library groups. During the 1976-1977 academic year, the budget allotment to the library for book acquisitions amounted to \$59, 000. After a year of rigorous campaigning involving mailings and several social gatherings, the Gustavus Library Associates boasted a membership of 350 and a total amount raised for the library of \$110,000.

This total far exceeded the GLA's objective for the first year of raising enough money to cover the library's \$60,000 portion of a \$200,000 challenge grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities. Having reached that goal, the GLA soon set out to attain new objectives. The second major opportunity presented itself in the form of a bid for a chapter of Phi Beta Kappa. A previous application by Gustavus Adolphus College in 1976 had been turned down by the council with the suggestion that the college increase its library acquisitions budget and establish an endowment to "sustain the accelerated acquisitions program."¹ The GLA accepted the challenge, and after

¹Haeuser, Mike "What Friends Are For: Gaining Financial Independence" in Wilson Library Bulletin; May 1986

another visit by the accreditation committee in 1982, Gustavus Adolphus was granted a charter to establish the Eta Chapter of Phi Beta Kappa of Minnesota.

Each year, the GLA establishes a clearly defined goals and incorporates these specific missions into its assemblage of social events. In past years these events have included talks by guest speakers Maria Von Trapp, Irving Stone, Nobel Literature Laureates Isaac B. Singer and Czeslaw Milosz, and a host of membership teas, plays, and culture days. The GLA also has traditionally sponsored activities during the St. Lucia festival in December and the annual Nobel Conference held on the college's campus. Swedish immigrants founded Gustavus Adolphus College in 1862, and the GLA follows the college's custom in maintaining the school's cultural bonds to Sweden through these demonstrations of their Swedish heritage.

The social events provide an inviting environment for potential members to be introduced to the GLA, and serve as a distribution point for the organization's literature. Participants who are not already members are encouraged to join with a financial contribution organized into different categories based on the amount donated. At each gathering, the organization reiterates its objectives to members and guests in order to maintain focus and to elevate their sense of mission. The membership dues and other funds raised through the yearly run of events provide a solid, consistent income for the library acquisitions endowment, but the largest portion of funds produced by the GLA, especially in the last decade have come from a major fundraising event staged biannually, called A Royal Affair.

At A Royal Affair guests are treated to an evening of fine dining, entertainment and an opportunity to bid on merchandise in the live and silent auctions. The size of the event requires the GLA to rent out large meeting halls in a Twin Cities hotel to accommodate the dinner tables and the auction

items. Preparation for each Royal Affair begins immediately after the previous one is completed. The approximately 800 guests at the first Royal Affair in April of 1978 raised over \$53,000 for the library, and capped off a year of success that received recognition in the form of a John Cotton Dana Award. This award was given to the Gustavus Library Associates by the H. W. Wilson Company for its "well-organized and energetic fundraising campaign resulting in increased library visibility and additional library acquisitions."

Each subsequent Royal Affair was held in the spring until 1987, when organizers shifted the event to the month of November, to coincide with the Christmas shopping season. Attendance for A Royal Affair generally falls between 800 and 1,000 guests and includes many more people than just the GLA membership. Invitations are sent out well in advance of the event to GLA members, donors, and Gustavus staff. In addition, advertisements find their way into the Gustavus Alumni magazine, the Gustavus Quarterly, with a circulation of over 20,000. Over time, A Royal Affair has become one of the premier fund raising events in the state of Minnesota. In 1989 A Royal Affair netted \$138,015 for the library endowment, a total narrowly eclipsing the \$132,000 raised during the most recent Royal Affair for the acquisition of an extensive collection of materials by and about Nobel Literature Laureates.

The Royal Affairs held in 1991 and 1993 clearly were the most financially successful events held since the founding of the GLA, but stand out as exceptions when compared to the other seven Royal Affairs. From the \$138,000 peak in 1989, the net amount raised has dipped as low as \$42,271 in 1982. A satisfactory explanation for such a broad range in totals is elusive, but memos from the planning stages of A Royal Affair in 1982 reflect concerns that donators were "holding back" and that people were less inclined to be free with their money than in other years. Elaine Brostrom, then president,

alluded to problems in the printing process, referring to the delivering of invitations as a "nightmare". A comparison of membership figures between March of 1981 and March of 1982 in the same memo also revealed a decrease in membership from 420 to 317, yielding \$19,912 in 1982 as compared to the \$41,611 received from members the year before. A further factor in the low numbers for 1982 may have been the conditions present in the general operation of Bernadotte Library. A great deal of reorganization took place 1981 and 1983, affecting the staff roster and the technological processes of circulation. New names appeared on the library payroll as it modernized its facilities to stay abreast of the advancements made in technological resources. Such renovations, such as adding a new electronic security detector and computerized systems of cataloging at such a transitional period may have sapped much of the energy that would otherwise have been directed toward developing a cooperative strategy between the library and the GLA. Since 1982, however, the Royal Affairs have netted consistently higher totals, eclipsing \$100,000 twice in the last three efforts.

The vigorous efforts of the Gustavus Library Associates have not escaped the attention of various academic organizations. The American Library Association has awarded the GLA with its John Cotton Dana Award in 1978, 1980, 1983, and most recently in 1994. The Friends of Libraries U. S. A. presented the GLA with awards in 1989 and 1990 in the "raising the most money" category and for the "country's most outstanding friends group for an academic library." Honors were also granted from the Council for the Advancement and Support of Education in 1980 in the form of their Special Award for Exceptional Achievement, and from the Gale Research Company in 1987 came the Financial Development Award. These awards all attest to the effectiveness of the GLA's organization and the programs it develops.

While keeping a separate and distinct identity, the Gustavus Library Associates' leadership includes representatives of the two institutions it serves, Gustavus Adolphus College, and Folke Bernadotte Memorial Library. The organization's Executive Director, responsible for managing the group's funds and keeping records, is an officer in the college's Development office. The Head Librarian, along with the Executive Director are both members of the GLA Board of Directors. By structuring its organization in this manner, the GLA assures itself of a unified effort and limits bureaucratic timelags in communication and conflicts of interest between organizations.

The effective organizational structure, combined with the attention grabbing events held periodically throughout the year, create a system of operation that ties intimately with important campus events while also reflecting the sense of community found at Gustavus Adolphus College. By advancing the resources of the library, GLA members reinforce their own connections to the campus community through events readily associated with the college's identity. The planning and preparation for additional projects undertaken by the various committees of the GLA still further heighten the group's sense of ownership, and promote greater interaction among members. Such cooperative efforts have resulted in nearly \$1,000,000 raised for the library endowment since 1977, and an increase of library holdings from 150,000 in that year to 230,000 in 1991.