

Grass-roots group donates \$5,800 to help Groton Public Library open on Sundays

Published July 25, 2016 12:50PM | Updated July 25, 2016 7:14PM

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Groton — Members of a newly formed citizens' group in Mystic donated \$100 each this month, raising \$5,800 to help Groton Public Library open on Sundays this year.

The library has been open on Sundays during the school year for at least 35 years. But that was expected to end due to budget cuts.

The Power of Together Southeastern Connecticut 2, which gave the money, is an offshoot of a group that was formed in January 2014 to change lives and make a difference in the community.

"I think this is an amazing group and what they're trying to do, it's a wonderful idea," said Betty Anne Reiter, director of library services. "It's keeping your charitable donations locally for a good cause."

Groton town departments suffered cuts in the fiscal year that began July 1 because of a major decline in revenue. The library's decision to remain closed on Sundays saved about \$17,800.

The group in Mystic, which has 58 members, started as a spinoff of the original [Power of Together Southeastern Connecticut](#). That group meets at Niantic Community Church and has 100 members, including several with matching donations from businesses.

The groups in Niantic and Mystic meet quarterly. In both cases, each member at the meeting commits to donating \$100 and has a chance to suggest the name of a charity or cause that should receive the money.

Members then drop the suggestions in a hat, and someone draws three at random.

After the drawing, the member who proposed each of the three charities gives a five-minute presentation, followed by a short question-and-answer period.

Then the group votes and the winning organization receives a \$100 check from each person at the meeting.

The whole process takes 45 minutes or less.

"It's so good and it's so genuine and there's no money for administration," said mortgage broker Jay Johnston, a member of the Niantic group. "All the money goes to charity and we know everyone's busy, so we're in at 7 p.m., and we're out at quarter to 8. And it's the best 45 minutes you're going to spend."

"If you don't feel good when you go out of there, you need to go right to (Lawrence + Memorial Hospital) and get your heart checked," he added.

"We've donated over \$75,000," said Deborah Fountain, a founder of the original group in Niantic and a local Realtor. "It's just incredible the impact a group of people coming together can have on our local community."

On July 13, the Niantic group donated \$10,500 to the Gemma E. Moran mobile food pantry. The Mystic group met on July 12 and donated \$5,800 to Groton Public Library.

The library took the \$5,800 it received and combined it with salary savings to come up with \$14,000 to restore Sunday hours.

A longtime staff member retired in June, and a newer employee was hired, which provided those staff savings, Reiter said.

The library will open from 1 to 5 p.m. on Sundays for 30 weeks, from Sept. 18 through April 30.

“It obviously is a day when families can come in together and use the building, so it’s a shame to cut a time when it’s available for families,” Reiter said.

Children do homework, adults use the computers, teens show up and seniors seek out a place to go because the Groton Senior Center is closed, library staff said.

Last year, 9,000 people visited the library on the 34 Sundays it was open.

“It’s trite, but it’s a community center,” Reiter said. “It’s a place that’s warm in the winter and cool in the summer, and we have some people who come in to just have a place where they’re welcome.”

It costs about \$520 per Sunday to keep the library open. The library uses a different staff on Sundays, so cutting those hours initially offered a chance to make one cut to save a large chunk of money.

“We were very lucky that our cause was chosen, but it is a one-time solution,” Reiter said.

The library will seek to have funding restored in the next budget year, she said.

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