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Orange Glove Events: Clemson University Library's Special Collections Roadshow

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Kay Wall and Eric C. Shoaf

Orange Glove events

Clemson University Library's special collections roadshow

The Clemson University Libraries (CUL) has developed a unique donor event that has resulted in immediate and tangible success. Dubbed "Orange Glove" affairs, the gatherings promote fundraising efforts in an environment where prospects are able to learn about and personally inspect items from special collections after enjoying good food and company. Four such affairs have been held thus far, and one more is planned. Both of the successful Orange Glove events generated significant spontaneous donations with other gifts flowing after the event. The key feature of these gatherings is a high-touch approach to special collections. Library staff describe and provide context for some of the finer items from its special collections, and attendees are allowed to handle the items themselves using cotton gloves in the bright orange Clemson University colors. The interactive approach has been a key in the success of the events and has brought goodwill, as well as dollars, to CUL.

The initial idea for the Orange Glove events came from Chantal Dunham at the University of Georgia (UGA), who talked about donor events held in their library's special collections at an Academic Library Advancement and Development Network (ALADN) conference.

As described, these events were seated dinners with an upfront per-plate cost to attendees that were held on campus in a library

facility. After the food and program, attendees would don white gloves and "handle" rare items from special collections. Of course, UGA has a rather large and extended special collections and an active friends of the library group with whom to plan, arrange, publicize, and oversee the event in a professional manner.

In taking this kernel of an idea and flipping it on its head, CUL chose to make this a special collections roadshow. The idea is that taking the materials to donors in larger metro areas can create an environment where cultivating support is a natural process, and direct contact with the materials makes "the ask" all the more timely. By exposing potential donors to the treasures, they learned about the unique items in the library. It was a point of pride and a chance for those interested in the library to experience in an interactive environment the thrill of handling materials that are hundreds of years old, intellectually significant, or with a clear focus on the history of Clemson University.

CUL has a network of library ambassadors, charged with helping provide access to potential donors, who are scattered across the state and serve as hosts for area events,

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inviting their friends and Clemson alums who may otherwise not come to the campus.

The library ambassadors function as a quasi-friends type group who are also passionate library supporters of means who can host the Orange Glove events in their homes or local venues. This adds to the ambience of the event, even though it does limit their size. The latter is not actually a bad thing as the stations for each group of collections need to be staffed and monitored during the affair. It also means that the guest list can be adjusted by size and limited to local supporters

special collection items are displayed. Stations displaying the materials are set up depending on the size of venue, and library staff (wearing white gloves) are at the tables to monitor use and explain the significance of each item. Guests pick up orange gloves to wear, and most don't necessarily handle the items but rather listen to the stories, ask questions, and generally marvel at the type and range of the items on display. In addition to the expected books, CUL has also brought from the special collections manuscripts, architectural drawings, broadsides, handbills, and maps.



Clemson University Library Ambassadors and staff at Orange Glove event in Greenville, South Carolina.

of means who enjoy active engagement, but who might not be able to get to the somewhat remote main campus. Clemson is a few hours drive from several major population areas in the southeast, and taking the material to the people in this case has been beneficial.

Once a host is identified, the university's Development Office uses their event management skills to organize the invitations, staging, guest management, and catering, using their own budget—a boon to managing the event from the library's point of view. Staging is important. Selecting a host means having a home or appropriate venue with sufficient space indoors and out to manage at least 50 people. All food and beverage is casual (cocktail party style) and separate from the area where the

There is no question that whoever heads the special collections unit in the library will be a bit squeamish about bringing out some of the treasures. It is a good idea to bring unique materials but not the absolute rarest of items. For letters and manuscripts, consider creating nice facsimiles, or make sure these items are in mylar sleeves for protection. Take memorabilia and objects from the collection, especially donated items, to demonstrate that donors can provide funds and papers for the library.

Managing the issues related to presentation are important. Library staff attending the event are a mix of special collections workers and senior staffers who are trained prior to the event both in handling fragile

items and are provided with background information about the specific materials they will oversee. The space is laid out with the stations close enough that there is always some help or backup just a few steps away. Close attention to detail is helpful. CUL has tailored the displayed items to those who were invited as well as the location of the event. For example, historical maps of the location where the Orange Glove event was held have been displayed.

Needless to say, the library invested in a number of orange gloves, and the staff actually wear white ones in order to make use of the orange gloves more special. At the end of the evening, guests are invited to take away one of the orange gloves and can receive the matching half of the pair by sending a donation to support the library. Donations and support, both financial or other gifts, are a key goal of such an event.

In some venues, the host challenged the attendees that he or she would match any financial donations given that night to support special collections. The hosts are recognized at the event for their support and kindness, and are given a framed set of orange gloves, complete with a Clemson tiger paw embroidered on them as a thank you for their support.

As with any such event, careful planning is necessary and coordination with the central development operation at the institution will

not only pay dividends in terms of success but also in partnerships for future events. At one event, the library's development officer was stationed in a separate area with a sports memorabilia item that recently received conservation attention through the generous donation of a library supporter. The development officer explained the significance of the item and the importance of the conservation treatment it received, then directly asked attendees to support conservation action for other items.

As a follow-up, about a week or so after the affair, attendees receive a letter thanking them for attending and asking for their support. At some events, a specific special collections item needing conservation treatment is identified and proceeds from the Orange Glove event directed toward this work is included in the solicitation letter. A brochure is also inserted with the mailing that describes CUL Foundation accounts in order to facilitate the donation process.

The four Orange Glove events already held were a great success, as measured by funds raised and goodwill established. One additional event is planned for the near future, perhaps leading to some sort of capstone event targeting all library donors. The approach represents an opportunity for small to medium-size libraries to create a unique but safe environment to use special collections in soliciting donations that is truly hands-on. ♪

("Marriage equality," cont. from page 307)

including the California Family Alliance, Focus on the Family, and the Family Research Council. The three main projects of ProtectMarriage.com are the ProtectMarriage.com Action Fund, the ProtectMarriage.com Education Fund, and the Proposition 8 Legal Defense Fund. Access: <http://protectmarriage.com/>.

Notes

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