

We Had a “Maker Festival” and So Can You!

Central Rappahannock Regional Library
Celebrates Resurgency in Do-It-Yourself Movement

by Martha M. Hutzel and Janice A. Black

At the beginning of each year, a committee at the Central Rappahannock Regional Library (CRRL) meets to select a book for its annual communitywide read. This book title, together with the programs and events associated with it, have come to be known as “Rappahannock Reads,” which plays off the name of the library and the river that runs through Fredericksburg, Virginia. After deciding that this year’s book selection would have something to do with creative people who either make wonderful things or transform their community with their creative energy, the committee selected *Made by Hand: My Adventures in the World of Do-It-Yourself*, by Mark Frauenfelder. As the editor-in-chief of *Make Magazine* and also an editor of the popular *being, being* blog, Frauenfelder is recognized as a leader and role model



in the resurgent do-it-yourself (DIY) movement. However, emailing the busy author and asking if he would speak at our library kick-off event in the Fall of 2013 proved to be the easiest part of the event planning! Frauenfelder emailed back within the hour and said he thought it would be fun, and so began nine months of planning,

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strategizing, contacting, scheduling, and sharing of ideas. The previous year (in 2012) the community-wide read had been about the local food movement, and the series of events and programs associated with it had lasted for eight months; in 2013 the organizers decided that the festival should last less than two months and it should be held in the fall. In this case, less really is more and is decidedly easier on all staff involved!

Now we had staff on board, an author, a book, and some meeting rooms scheduled for various events at all eight library branches. But what next? How could we make this series relevant, exciting, and well attended? Where do you find Makers in the community who are willing to come to your library and demonstrate what they do and share their knowledge *for free*? How do you make this a genuine

communitywide event (and not just have your own creative staff do all the demonstrations and run all the programs)? We truly wanted to bring in local community groups and individuals, put our newest branch on the map in a more definite way, and gain exposure for all the valuable programs and services we offer in our library system. Like all library systems, we want to be known for more than books and computers, and we knew we wanted to create something big and something memorable.

Creativity is Very Important

We were faced with the challenge of pulling together a big event with participation of an exciting cross-section of Makers from throughout our region. Janice Black, our Collection Development Coordinator and a Maker herself, did the initial

brainstorming that led to the idea of turning the author event into a Festival of Community Makers. She came to an organizational meeting with a very long list of local artisans and groups (specialized as well as general) to seek out. Initially the plan was to invite local groups with specific interests in technology or DIY topics so that others in the community could meet up and join in. Makers, Linux users, robotics, coffee roasters, beer brewers, musicians, quilters and knitters—we tried to find and invite them all.

Then it was time for the creative person to pass the project on to the administrative workhorse, Martha Hutzler, who would see that the job got done. The organizers then invited local Makers to do one of two things: come to the Festival of Community Makers or schedule one or more programs in library

branches and share their specialty. (We also hoped that many of them would continue their relationship with the CRRL and be willing to offer future programs, and several of them already have.) Our web team created a great online registration form for the festival event, which asked participants what they would be making or demonstrating, how much space they would need, whether they needed electrical access, whether they would prefer to be outside or inside, etc. Practical matters were important, since we needed to know if we had enough room, enough outlets, enough tables, and enough variety in our offerings to keep our “customers” interested.

Promotion and Publicity

Once the online registration form went up on the library website, we began promoting the festival and programs that we would be hosting afterwards. Our graphics department created posters, bookmarks, and flyers; placed ads in several local print publications; and sent press releases to the local newspaper. We promoted it all on our social media pages and posted articles on our website. We printed more posters than we normally would and had staff post them all over the region. Our Youth Services Coordinator, Rebecca Purdy, instructed her staff to line up classes and events that involved making and creating, and our Adult Services Coordinator, Chele Brown, did the same. The result was a wonderful list of 60 different events that could be listed on one attractive quadfold brochure that could be easily distributed

at all branches, around the community, and during every event at the library. (The link to the brochure listing all the events associated with the communitywide read can be found at <http://www.librarypoint.org/madebyhand>.)

Two of us went on a local radio program and promoted the Maker Festival and all the associated classes and events that involved

such activities as repurposing books, making dog treats, raising honey bees, foraging for wild food, building with Legos, making soap and candles, turning trash into art, designing geekware jewelry, window farming, composting 101, raising chickens, homebrewing, building a robot... the list just kept on going! The radio program was a lot of fun and gave us an opportunity to talk about our library, what we offer, and how libraries have changed in the last 1520 years. The radio host got a huge kick out of some of the topics we were offering!

What if No One Comes to Your Party?

We all know the adage, “build it and they will come,” but “offer it and they will attend” is not necessarily true! The online registration form for the festival was set up to land in the Admin inbox after being filled out by the Maker or artist, and we were living in fear that no one would sign up to be a Maker and even if they did, no customers would come to the events! But the completed forms started dribbling in, a few here and there, but still not enough to fill a large library and build the kind of excitement and attendance we were striving for. With about two months to go before the big kickoff event on September 14th, we had only 10 different Makers signed up to present their craft. Insufficient to fill a 30,000 square foot library, but a start nonetheless; still, we were terrified of opening the inbox and finding no completed registration forms! We then decided to do what in the sales business



is called “cold calling.” We went through every local print and online source we could think of looking for artists, Makers, and articles about anything and anyone who might be willing participants and then called the Maker or group. We made a pitch and asked them to come to our event and to fill out the online form to register. We charged no fee and in return they received free exposure; after awhile it became an easy sell!

Our community loves our library system, and a chance to present their craft at our newest branch was temptation enough for quite a few Makers. The registration forms started arriving in quantities sufficient enough for us to relax a little and focus on details. Once we hit about 25 different Makers, we were

satisfied that we had enough to make a good show of things...but the registration forms and phone calls just kept on coming! Word spread...and then our concerns shifted. We were almost afraid to open the inbox or answer the phone for fear that one more Maker would ask to participate! As late as two days before the kickoff, we received a call from a group of hackers in Richmond, HackRVA, who asked to be included. Of course we had no intention of telling anyone no, so we started borrowing tables from other branches of the library. On September 14th, 2013 we had approximately 34 different Makers with a wide variety of activities, as well as food vendors, food trucks, and coffee roasters outside. We decided to put kids and teen activities

in the youth services end of the building, tech Makers together in the middle, arts and crafts in another area, food Makers near the public kitchen, and anything really loud or messy outside.

But What if Everyone Comes to Your Party?

Given the amount of planning, publicity, and promotion we did, and the large number of Makers lined up, we thought it would be great if we got 300–400 customers to attend. It was a beautiful Saturday afternoon, but there were two other popular community events taking place that same day. However, Mark Frauenfelder has a big following, and apparently so
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The Festival of Community Makers was just the beginning...

by Janice A. Black

Armed with a Makerbot Replicator2® 3D printer, Chris Robertson of the CRRL IT department sets up the Mobile Maker Lab in the lobby of each of the library’s eight branches at least once a month. (CRRL actually purchased the printing equipment with funds accumulated from years of recycling printer toner cartridges.) Customers of all ages stop to watch, fascinated, as the filament builds the object from the CAD (computer-aided design) files on the laptop.

Many have heard of 3D printers in the news but have never had an opportunity to see one at work. They ask many questions, respond to each other’s inquiries, chat, and consider the possibilities. Some customers are excited to find this technology to be exactly what they need to move a favorite project forward! So far, local innovators have expressed an interest in creating prototypes for diverse subjects ranging from music, gaming, jewelry, and awards to roofing, turkey hunting, and model railroads.

Although the technology has been available for decades, it was mostly hidden behind doors in universities or big businesses; now libraries are able to share it with everyone. The CRRL Mobile Maker Lab and STEM (science, technology, engineering, math) programming have been featured at the 2013 Fred-Tech STEM Summit

at the University of Mary Washington (UMW), the Family Days on Technology at the Fredericksburg Area Museum, and other events. Within these community contexts, the library staff has been able to meet with hundreds of people from the area who may not have realized that libraries are not just about books anymore!

New Connections

As a result of the success of the One Read program, the Festival of Community Makers, and the Mobile Maker Lab, the CRRL is in the process of establishing permanent Maker Lab spaces in both its England Run and downtown Fredericksburg Headquarters branch. These fun spaces will be used for a wide variety of hands-on programs, and can be booked by outside DIY groups.

The library has forged important new connections in the community. Its collaboration with the Education Department at UMW has led to active involvement in the library’s STEM and Maker programming by the university’s students and interns. A local start-up group of Makers, FredericksWerken, is providing programs on Arduino and electronics, and hosting “open hack nights” to encourage informal technology-centric



social gatherings at the library. The start-up group is also able to use the meeting rooms for their organizational sessions. In addition, the library was able to hire one of the local Makers, who started a business called Fitz Kitz, to make a Maker Bench that doubled as a house for the tools and maker equipment provided by UMW.



As a result of the Makers community festival and related activities, CRRL has successfully expanded its connections with local schools, small businesses, and entrepreneurs. The entire series of activities, from planning through the final event, took almost a year, but it was a wonderful experience and everyone who was involved learned a lot. **VI**

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does the CRRL! After he spoke to a standing-room-only crowd of about 150, he agreed to visit the tables of all the Makers and to sign copies of his books, which we had for sale. (We also purchased extra copies of his book to add to our collection, as well as numerous copies to circulate as “read and pass on,” hoping to generate interest as well as checkout stats.) Our local newspaper ran a huge article about Frauenfelder’s visit a few weeks in advance, and that’s when we found out that he has groupies! One man rushed in the doors and said, “Where is Mark Frauenfelder? I have a first edition of *Make Magazine* and I want him to sign it!” We had over 1,000 customers come through our doors, which

we finally just propped open and invited the outside in! There were so many people in the library that when our County Administrator stopped by we had to apologize for such a crowded parking lot and building! Every available space in the library was filled with customers and Makers, and the teens scheduled to shelve books that day couldn’t because there was no space to push a book truck! We ran out of parking spaces early in the day and customers had to park on the street, in a nearby school parking lot, at the Temple, in nearby apartment building lots, and anywhere else they could find room.

The excitement and energy inside the library branch was palpable, and by far the most popular

tables were those that involved 3D printing, robotics, and any other tech/geek activity. The kickoff event was held at our England Run Branch, which opened in October 2010, and many of the visitors that particular day were first timers. Kids and teens were enthralled with the dancing robot, and we had a crowd around our own MakerBot 3D printer all afternoon! A group of teen boys came in to the event and were overheard saying “OMG! It’s everywhere!” Needless to say, the event was a huge success and we received many positive comments and requests to repeat it all again very soon and to take the show on the road to our other branches. We haven’t done either of those yet, but there’s still time! **VI**