

# Lions, Tigers and Bears

## • Keep 'em Reading •

by | Andre Crafford

### How Library Mascots Can Increase Participation and Motivation within Your Library Program

Attend any football or basketball game throughout the United States and you will see mascots dressed in elaborate and colorful costumes to whip the crowd into a loud frenzy as they cheer and root for the home team.

Whether it's a ferocious tiger or a dancing chicken, mascots have been used in athletic events to boost team spirit. They have also found their way into public and school libraries to motivate patrons to read and support the library programs.

Booker is one such library mascot housed at the Steele Memorial Library in Elmira, New York. Jim Sleeth, the library's director, explains how the concept for their library mascot began—"Every five years, our staff gets together in one large group to brainstorm about library programs and services. We talk about what to drop, what to keep and what we might add to the array of services. Improving publicity about the programs and services is always at the top of the list. One staff member who specializes in children's services suggested we take our lead from our small town's baseball and hockey teams. They have mascots, why not the library? The idea instantly caught on."



Booker™ Steele Memorial Library

Sleeth described the process as a group effort with many people working together for one purpose. They formed a small committee in June of 2002 to discuss the purpose of the mascot. The library wanted to publicize their programs, especially the children's programs, and they thought an owl reflected learning, knowledge and wisdom—all characteristics they wanted the library associated with. When they began to think about who might design the mascot, a well-known and local children's

author and illustrator quickly came to mind. The library approached the illustrator, and he quickly agreed to talk with them about the project.

He took the "big-eyed owl" idea and brought personality and color to the character.

Everyone loved the concept so the illustrator went back to the drawing board to create full color and black-and-white renditions. Although the original target age group was six years and younger, the library soon learned that everyone loved Booker! Sleeth said that plans for introducing the library mascot to the public soon followed, as well as plans for developing a fan club, stickers and T-shirts. Booker was even made into a life-sized costume, which makes appearances in the library and around town.

Booker is a welcome addition to the Steele Memorial Library and has been incorporated into much of the publicity—from library cards to letterhead. He makes special appearances in the local elementary schools by promoting the library and explaining how kids can obtain library cards. The library also painted images of Booker on branch library windows to

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welcome all into the library. Sleeth believes that Booker is one of the best investments the library has ever made!

Another library mascot is Metro Mouse at the Columbus Metropolitan Library in Columbus, Ohio. The library's purpose of Metro Mouse was to put books in the hands of children. During the school year, the library targets preschoolers and day care centers, especially those that receive government subsidies. During the summer, Metro Mouse visits neighborhoods, stopping at places where children spend their time. The focus of this service is pre-literacy—everything is done to encourage reading and the love of books at an early age.

Lisa Sloan, News Operations Specialist for the library, explained that the concept for Metro Mouse was developed in the late 1980s by the library's communications department. When the department decided the library should have a mascot, the members researched to determine the type of mascot. They looked at the mascots of local organizations and companies and they also researched animals, including what animals most appealed to kids. The department selected a mouse and soon the concept of Metro Mouse took shape.

Metro Mouse adorns the library's two bookmobiles and the library also has a Metro mouse costume, which makes appearances at library events such as the Summer Reading Club kick-off party. He also appears occasionally at community events and has appeared in some of the library's videos.

The goal of Metro Mouse was to excite children about books and reading so that they will develop a long-term interest in reading and lifelong learning.

Steele Memorial Library and the Columbus Metropolitan Library offer two successful stories in which mascots were used to build literacy and library programs within their communities. Both Metro Mouse and Booker have become permanent fixtures at these libraries. The mascots promote not only a love of reading, but motivate children to visit the library and check out books. The next time you walk into your library, think about how a lion, tiger or bear could cheer on and motivate your patrons to catch that reading spirit!

