



Chris Reagle

By Chris Reagle

Gatehouse News Service

Posted Mar 12, 2010 @ 11:00 AM

MARION —

A good book can be so many things to the reader, but for a group of women bibliophiles in Marion, it's also become a way to help those in need and other worthwhile causes.

The Marion Book Study Group has been meeting for 25 years as a way of exchanging ideas and dialogue, and now, philanthropy. Since 2006, the ladies discussion book group has given thousands of dollars to area libraries, food pantries, music programs, and most recently, international relief, through The Women's Fund "Giving Circles" of The Community Foundation of Southeastern Massachusetts.

"This is a vehicle to advance women's philanthropy," Christina Bascom, a long-time member of the Marion Book Study Group and supporter of The Women's Fund, said.

Each time the book group meets to discuss the book of the month, it takes a monetary collection from the members. The amounts given vary from meeting to meeting. Usually, at the end of the year, members pool the money and decide on the charity, and sometimes special collections are taken. Once the collection reaches a threshold, The Women's Fund will match the donation up to \$500.

"The idea is if you just give even just a dollar, it adds up," Marion Book Study Group member Trudy Kingery said.

In 2006, the first year the book study group became involved in the Giving Circle, it donated \$450 for the purchase of children's books for Wareham Free Library. The following year, the group amped up and raised \$2,500 and, coupled with a \$500 Women's Fund grant, donated \$3,000 to provide funding for New Bedford Symphony Orchestra's "Music in the Morning," which provides classical music to elementary schools, including Sippican School.

Each year since the local Giving Circle was initiated, Marion Book Study Group has donated an average of \$1,000 to programs that include the Tri-County Symphonic Band, Market Ministries, Salvation Army, Damien's Pantry and others.

So far this year, The Giving Circle of Marion Book Study Group collected \$700 from its members and received a \$500 Women's Fund matching grant, which was donated to earthquake relief efforts in Haiti through the "Partners in Health" program run by Dr. Paul Farmer at UMass Dartmouth.

Giving Circles are growing in popularity. A surf of the Web will turn up dozens of Giving Circles across the United States. Giving Circles can be initiated by any group of women who meet for a common purpose, according to Kate Fentress, the executive director of The Women's Fund of The Community Foundation of Southeastern Massachusetts.

"Giving Circles are a group of women who get together to make a credible gift as a group," Fentress said. "There are many, many different kinds of Giving Circles. The national model is more along the lines of a group of women who donated between \$5,000 to \$10,000 per year."

Fentress said those financial goals may be the national model, but giving amounts and causes are determined by the group. The Community Foundation of Southeastern Massachusetts' Women's Fund initiated Giving Circles in 2005 and the concept is slowly building momentum.

"What we found was most women, most groups, have their own ideas about they want we want to do," Fentress said. "Rather than prescribe what they would so, the groups decide for themselves. One of our goals is to encourage women's philanthropy. We really want to support them in something they care about. They are doing something in a shared way and have complete control of where it is going and in the doing learn more about the challenges we face."

Fentress said any women's group interested in forming a Giving Circle should contact her to maximize their giving. She said she'll come speak before the group to explain how it works. Fentress can be reached by calling 508-717-0283 or e-mailing to: www.cfsema.org/womensfunds

"When women want to get together and put their money together, they can really do some amazing things," she said.