

How Friends of PCI Supports Our Neighborhood Branch Library

By Pamela Freyd, President

Friends of the Philadelphia City Institute Library

The FREE Library of Philadelphia! That's been the name since the library was chartered in 1891, when Dr. William Pepper provided initial funding for "a general library, which shall be free to all." During the next 124 years, the free library system grew to encompass the Central Library, the internet, and regional, neighborhood and specialized branches.

If the Library is free, why does the Friends of the Philadelphia City Institute (PCI) Library (our neighborhood branch, located on West Rittenhouse Square at Locust St.) ask for membership dues? Many people think the library is a city service like trash collection or police. It is not that simple.

A little over two-thirds of the library's operating funds come from the city, another 17 percent from the state, and the remaining 15 percent from private sources (including fines from overdue books). Most of the private support for the Free Library of Philadelphia comes through the Free Library Foundation.

Seventy-five percent of the library's budget goes to payroll, 10 percent to materials, and the rest to administrative support (which includes anything related

to technology), and to maintenance and security. The Free Library Foundation does an exemplary job of raising funds to support the library. Money donated to the Free Library Foundation goes to programming and special collections.

In the 1990s, when the library system began to renovate most sites, including the installation of computers, each branch was expected to form a Friends group to help pay for computers. The Friends groups have endured, providing financial support and advocacy for the branches. The membership money collected by Friends groups supplements other resources. At PCI, for example, Friends' funding helped our neighborhood branch purchase new audio speakers for the meeting room. The PCI library could have requisitioned new speakers with its discretionary budget, but it would have been months before the speakers arrived, necessitating the cancellation of scheduled programs in December and January. But thanks to the Friends of PCI, new speakers were in place within a week, and all programs could proceed as planned.

People can join the Friends of PCI by filling out a membership form kept at the

checkout desk and returning it with monies. Some people think they are members of the Friends of the PCI Library because they have made a donation to the Free Library Foundation and indicated that it was used for PCI. Indeed, that donation will be sent to PCI for discretionary use, but the local Friends group may not necessarily know who has donated. The Library Foundation has an equitable system for providing discretionary funds to all branches.

The Friends of PCI thanks its many supporters and invites others to join. We welcome your suggestions and support for our wonderful library.

For more information about ways in which the neighborhood branches affect urban quality of life, consult The Pew Charitable Trusts' 2012 study of the Free Library of Philadelphia, *The Library in the City: Changing Demands and a Challenging Future*. It is worth reading; go to <http://www.pewtrusts.org/en/research-and-analysis/reports/2012/03/07/the-library-in-the-city-changing-demands-and-a-challenging-future>

Dancing Canvas: Dance Critic Nancy Heller to Speak on Sargent's "El Jaleo"

Nancy G. Heller, art historian, author, dance critic for the *Philadelphia Inquirer*, and professor of Art History at the University of the Arts, will speak about John Singer Sargent's painting, "El Jaleo," depicting a flamenco dancer. The presentation will take place at the Athenaeum, 219 South 6th St., Wednesday, October 21, at 5:30. A reception will follow. Heller has studied and performed Spanish dance since the 1980s, and is a lively and interesting presenter. She is the author of *Why a Painting Is Like a Pizza: A Guide to Understanding and Enjoying Modern Art*, and *Women Artists*. The painting resides at the Isabella Stewart Gardner museum in Boston. Tickets can be purchased online at the Athenaeum's website for \$10. (Free for Athenaeum members.) An article about Nancy G. Heller appeared in the *Center City Quarterly*, September 2012.

—Bonnie Eisenfeld



Eddy Palumbo