

# Follow Your Leads into Your Local Summer Reading Program...

## *To Keep Your Enrollments Growing — It's a Community Leadership and Public Relations Bonanza!*

The summer months can be a slow time for many martial arts schools —unless you have a proactive strategy. Just because your local school system is closed for summer recess doesn't mean your leads have disappeared. Follow those prospective students and their parents into their summertime activities and locations.

For many students, summer continues to be a time for learning, but often in a more casual setting, such as your library's summer reading program. I discovered that such a program offers a great opportunity to reach those leads, demonstrate my community leadership and reap the rewards publicizing my participation.

Many summer reading programs encourage local adults to be guest presenters/readers; and martial arts has just the kind of positive message that will attract the attention of librarians as well as children and parents.

You have a wonderful story to tell, so don't overlook this rather simple and inexpensive opportunity to educate children, adults and your community about the many benefits of martial arts.

There are many benefits for you, too.

- Publicize your volunteer work and that you are a community leader, concerned with education, literacy and self-development.
- Creates new promotional opportunities that would otherwise be available.
- Costs little, since libraries generally promote the program and your participation.
- Possibly qualifies as a business tax deduction.
- Exposures qualified leads to your school and its program and yourself during the slow summer months.

- Provides an opportunity to educate individuals and the community about the martial arts.

### Writing Your Proposal

Librarians consider themselves professionals and so should you, so I recommend that you plan your participation in a summer reading program and write a brief proposal (maybe in the form of a letter), according to the details in this report.

- Your Plan A starts with planning well in advance, since your local library will develop its summer reading program before the end of the school year.
- Your primary goal is to become a celebrity/guest presenter.
- Ask the library if it has a theme for its reading program and develop your participation according to that theme, if you can. For example, a few years ago, my local library was celebrating its 100th anniversary, so my presentation included "100 action-packed moves" during our demonstration/mini-class.
- Most summer reading programs provide rewards and other incentives. You can create a promotional package — free lessons, free uniform, free copy of book you read, etc. — and offer it as an incentive that the library can give to a child.
- If you start your planning late or you can't develop a presentation based on the library's theme (which is what happened to me one year), then try Option B.

### Option B

- An alternative approach is to offer the library your presentation as a stand-alone event. One year, we offered to donate several books on martial arts to the children's department. In return, we scheduled

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a special reading of one of the books and an interactive demo/intro class.

- The library will often display the mini-library of martial arts books you've donated, featuring them as special interest items that can be easily checked out from the library following your presentation.
- Use this opportunity to explain that most martial arts books focus on physical moves, but you donated books that are more focused on character development and other educational benefits of the martial arts. This is not only informational and helps to combat media stereotypes, but also it is a soft sell of martial arts benefits to all the parents in the audience.

*[Note: You will want to preview the books you donate to make sure they communicate the right message for your school and community. It certainly isn't required that all the books are specific to your style. I recommend that you donate books for a variety of reading levels and age groups.]*

- Many libraries note the donors of books on their inside covers. Your donation will continue to provide free reading for the community — and free publicity for you — for years to come! Your donation may qualify for a tax deduction (check with your accountant).

Some libraries have budgets that allow them to give their guest presenters an honorarium. I have never accepted one for my presentations and would recommend that you not ask for one, since it may be perceived as a negative request, but your local library may offer an honorarium.

## Promoting Your Participation

Regardless of how you become involved, once you are part of the summer reading program schedule, you should be sure you're included in the promotional materials the library produces and distributes. At my local library, that includes pamphlets to patrons and flyers prominently displayed in the library and throughout the community. This is yet another method to announce your involvement, receive free publicity and generate goodwill.

Since the library promotes the reading program, your name may very well appear in places (like other businesses) that would not be receptive to posting

your promotional materials and information if you asked them yourself. For example, the local YMCA has a competing martial arts program and wouldn't likely post my school's information on its bulletin board, but might be willing to post a library flyer (that happens to have my school's name in it).

Although the library will promote its summer reading program and your participation as a presenter to the wider community, you should proactively promote the program at your school. Not only will you reciprocate by supporting the library, but also you will inform your current students and their parents that you volunteer and are a valuable part of the community. It should reinforce your role as an educator and not just an instructor with your current students.

If the library is publicity-conscious, then it will probably notify the local media of its summer reading program and provide details, including your participation. Local newspapers and radio and TV stations are more likely to publish the event if the library requests it.

Be proactive, however, and ask the library if it has contacted the local media. If it hasn't, then you could also help with that task. You can also ask the librarian if there are other ways you might be able to help promote the event.

## Your Appearance at the Library

Since this is a library event that encourages reading, I strongly recommend that you present/read a martial arts book — one that promotes the positive values of martial arts training and will attract and hold the attention of a decent age range.

I've read *Karate Hour* by Carol Nevius; it has a nice rhyme and large pictures, and isn't too long. It also explains a little more background and shows the belt ranks at the end. It makes reference to topics that the entire group can experience and also concepts that your upper ranks can demonstrate.

Whatever book you choose, it probably won't describe exactly your school, curriculum or the way you operate, but you can always elaborate as part of your presentation. I use *Karate Hour* because it explains the history behind the belts and the significance of the kyu (kup) ranks as opposed to belt colors.

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First, read the book without interruption, so the kids can follow the story. Then you can read it a second time, interjecting, demonstrating and elaborating on the similarities, differences, etc. Of course, including some of your model students of the same age group, as part of your presentation, will help.

Leave some time for questions and answers (you might even want to “plant” a couple of people with questions, in case you don’t receive any from the guests). Highlight the books that are available at the library if they want to learn more, particularly if they are ones you just donated.

Of course, have plenty of school information for people who may inquire, but make sure the library approves anything you plan to do. You also don’t want to come across as “making a sales pitch” and risk ruining the goodwill you just created.

In general, though, I have found the leads to be of good quality. Being involved in a summer reading program suggests that they take education and personal development seriously; and there may be a significant number of home-schooled children in attendance, a niche you might not have reached during your normal school talks. Now, all you have to do is demonstrate that martial arts classes at your school are a natural extension of those priorities.

## **Summary**

Participating in your local summer reading program allows you to reach children during the slow summer months; but, like the very act of teaching martial arts, your act of promoting your school will also do much good — namely, promoting literacy and creating a sense of volunteerism and community involvement. As you educate your audience about the benefits of martial arts and describe the arts in a positive light, you, as a professional, will also be bathed in that positive light (and possibly receive a tax benefit). Your summer reading program is a win-win event and rewarding experience for everyone involved.