

NCSU entrepreneurs aim high

By Jinnie Y. Davis

T-shirt sales turn into cash for the libraries' underfunded programs

Recent budget cuts at the North Carolina State University (NCSU) Libraries focused a great deal of attention on the need for support of collections purchases. Generating less publicity were behind-the-scenes needs such as the NCSU Libraries' inadequate funding for preservation efforts and for staff development activities. Three library staff members—Nancy Gibbs (chair of the Preservation Committee), Carmen Wijeyasingha (vice-president of the library's staff association), and Annis Barbee (staff association president)—seized the initiative to carry out a fundraising scheme for these two projects.

The three entrepreneurs gained the support of the library administration to create and sell

library souvenirs, with the proceeds going to the Preservation Fund and the Staff Development Fund, which were attempting to reach endowment level. In fall 1993, with support from the Friends of the Library, they received seed money which they agreed to repay through sales profits. Within two months they had produced five lines of sale items: t-shirts in three different colors, a mug, and a canvas bag, all based on the libraries' colorful logo.

By timing their sales during the pre-Christmas season and at the Friends of the Library's annual book sale, the staff members quickly exceeded their sales expectations. Based on continued demand for current and new products, they will diversify their product line with the addition of sweatshirts, a cardboard sunshade, and another t-shirt.

Gibbs and Wijeyasingha attribute their success to using a very attractive logo on quality merchandise. They also explain: "We advertised in a variety of ways, kept our stock supplies small, and had tremendous response from the library community. We hope to continue this trend in the future with additional items, and we hope to exceed our fundraising goals." With marketing savvy, they bolstered sales efforts by promotional tactics such as running photographs and order forms in the library newsletter, setting up a display of their wares in a library exhibit case, and obtaining permission from the university to set up a kiosk on the campus Brickyard, as well as in the branch libraries, in the spring.

The two funds benefiting from these sales are certainly worthy of the effort. According to Gibbs, "Existing funds for preservation are limited and, with this effort, we are able to

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Annis Barbee, Nancy Gibbs, and Carmen Wijeyasingha wear the t-shirts they developed.

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