Murder in the Library

Public Library of Youngstown and Mahoning County

Adults

|

Intergenerational

Murder in the Library

Feb 3, 2017

$251-500

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Byline

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We recently started an annual murder mystery program in our library, inviting patrons to both witness and interact with the drama as it unfolds.

After purchasing a murder mystery kit online and enlisting the performance skills of local actors and library staff, the program came together fairly easily. The event attracted 100 participants, appealing especially to our senior patrons.

Advanced Planning

The goal of this program was to unveil the newly refurbished Boardman branch of our system. Advanced planning began six months before the program. We purchased the Murder Mystery Party Games: Pasta, Passion & Pistols kit online — in which the body of "Pepi Roni" has been discovered and players must solve the crime before the killer strikes again — and made slight alterations in order to present the mystery as a dinner theater-type performance for our patrons, with some audience interaction. Roles were assigned to six staff members interested in participating, and two local actors were recruited to round out the cast of eight.

The program coordinator and team of performers brainstormed ideas for decorations, costumes and food. Most decorations and costumes were borrowed from staff, but a few items were purchased online, including a custom banner reading “La Speranza” (the name of the restaurant where the murder occurred) from Oriental Trading, and a priest costume from Amazon.com. Cast members were sent copies of their scripts, which they did not have to memorize. The program coordinator has extensive theater experience, so she also served as director during the dress rehearsal and event. This experience helped her organize the program quickly, efficiently and easily.

One week before the event, I reserved Mafia-related materials to display during the event, including "The Sopranos," "Goodfellas" and "The Godfather" trilogy on DVD and books such as "Mafia Princess" and "American Mafia."

The "menu" consisted of premade pasta salad from Walmart, and bread, butter and biscotti from Sam's Club. All food items were premade and pre-ordered, so we just had to pick up the food the day of the program.

Marketing

The program was advertised in the library's monthly programming newsletter, on the library's website and social media accounts, via our email list, and in press releases issued to local print and television outlets.

We used the following program summary in our marketing efforts (to great response):

The succulent aroma of home cooked pasta is drifting from New York City's most popular Italian eatery, La Speranza, but something else is heating up the kitchen ... cold-blooded murder! Restaurateur Pepi Roni has been shot in the back with his own pistol. Tonight his family and friends will gather to pay their respects to poor Pepi, but one of the guests won't be shedding any tears. You must solve the murder before the killer strikes again. Listen carefully to the suspects, study the crime scene, and watch for any unusual circumstances. ONLY THE SLEUTH WITH THE MOST CORRECT ANSWERS WILL WIN THE PRIZE! Light refreshments will be served.

However, it was word of mouth that has most helped us build an audience base. People who attended the first murder mystery event last year came back, and they brought their friends. As a result, we had to close registration this year due to high demand, and we even had a waiting list.

Budgeting

The programming team was allotted $350 to cover the menu, decorations, costumes, prizes and stipends for local actors.

The script retailed for $14.99 online. As part of the decorations, we set out library materials (books and DVDs) on topics related to the theme that patrons could check out.

Day-of-event Activity

A librarian from the Boardman branch called all patrons who were registered (100 total) the day before and the day of the performance to confirm their attendance. We had a waiting list and were able to move up several people.

We held one dress rehearsal from 5 to 9 p.m. the night before the program. All involved (eight actors plus the librarian in charge) helped set up and decorate, in addition to practicing with props, accents and costumes. The program was well planned, so very little had to be done the day of.

The pre-ordered menu items (pasta salad, bread, butter and biscotti) was picked up the day of the program. We set out the food and set places for all registered participants, providing patrons with plates, napkins, forks and bottles of water. No coffee or hot drinks were served. From our confirmed patrons list, we made nametags, which were used as reservation cards.

The event was held on a Thursday from 5 to 9 p.m. Patrons came up to the "hostess" (librarian in charge) and were asked if they had a reservation. They were then told where to sit and those with no reservations (yes, we had patrons who confirmed not show up, and patrons who did not register show up!) were seated outside the room until all reserved patrons were seated. The only challenge was that the room could have been larger because we had so many patrons!

After everyone was seated the program began, with the library staff and actors playing their roles. The actors invited the audience to observe closely and answer questions throughout the performance. The sleuth with the most correct answers at the end won a prize.

Program Execution

One hundred participants arrived eager to enjoy a murder mystery with an interactive component. Minor adjustments had to be made because the room did not easily accommodate the large number of people who attended, but very little did not go according to plan and nothing interrupted the flow of the narrative. Next year, we will move the program to a larger venue.

Attendees loved the program and asked when the next murder mystery will be held (we plan to explore the mystery of Hulas and Homicide in May). One gentleman suggested we do a theater-in-the-round and gave us a diagram on a napkin!

This program not only allowed adults to enjoy the library and participate in an arts program at no cost, but related library materials used for display were also checked out. Those who attended had the opportunity to socialize with peers as well as problem solve, use deductive reasoning and be part of a team.

Advice

While the kit we purchased contains clues, scripts and nametags, it was designed for individual characters to follow their own scripts at a small dinner party — so it contained no master script. We recommend creating a master script from the individual scripts; this makes directing the play much simpler and helps the actors.

With the popularity of the program and necessity of a waiting list this year, we tried to accommodate as many patrons as possible. A librarian called each registrant the day before and day of the performance to confirm attendance. If a cancellation occurred, we contacted patrons on the waiting list. She confirmed with all 100 registrants that they planned to attend, but there were still seven registrants who did not show. In an effort to eliminate this for next year's murder program, I will have a standby list of 10 patrons. Simply, we will confirm 110, figuring that some will still not show, and still be able to guarantee seating for all who attend.

Pre-planning is key to the execution of this event, so do everything you can ahead of time. Many items were completed when I was on desk!

One last observation: Participating staff members were youth and adult librarians, as interest dictated who volunteered for this project. It is especially nice to see staff from different departments working together and having fun together and with our patrons.

Did you try this program at your library? Share your experience using this form.

Supporting Materials

Download this Program as a PDF

- Programming Librarian Facebook Group

Slideshow Images

Image






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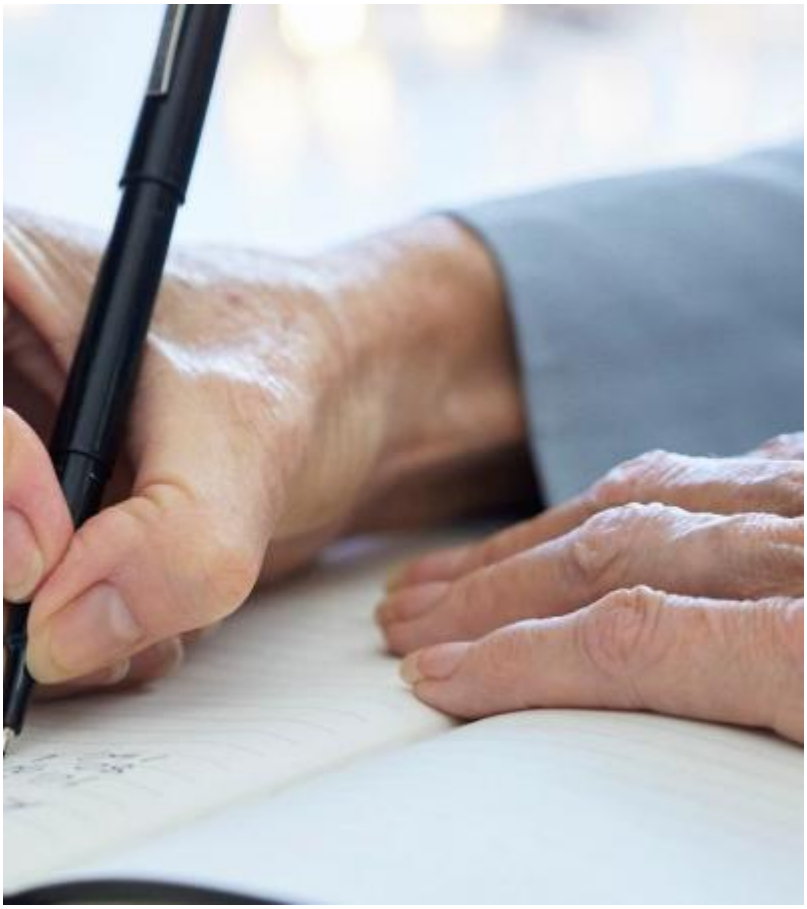
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