

Get to Know Your Local Published Romance Authors

by Stephanie Bond

If you'd like to build a relationship with local romance authors, but aren't sure who they are or where to start, here are a few ideas to get things moving:

Logon to the RWA website, www.rwanational.com, and click on "Chapters" from the menu. From that page, you can drill down to find RWA local chapters that are in proximity to your store. Most chapter websites list the names of published members. Be aware, however, that sometimes authors join chapters as remote members—just because they belong to a chapter doesn't mean they live in the area, although usually that's the case.

If you want to contact authors individually, you can usually link to their website from the chapter website. If you can't find a website or email address, you might be able to contact the author through her publisher/house publicist.

Alternately, you could email the chapter president or designated representative and request a contact list (name, phone number, email) for all the published authors in the chapter for your handy reference.

Most authors welcome contact from a local bookseller, but know that many published authors shy away from book signings because of the time involved and bad experiences with ambitious orders and low sales, resulting in stripped books, which can adversely affect orders for their next book. And some authors simply prefer not to make public appearances. If an author balks at doing a signing, ask if she'll come by and sign her stock. You might consider sending one email to all published authors in the area, inviting them to caravan to your store together to sign stock.

Aside from stock signings, published authors are typically willing to:

- Do an interview for your store newsletter/website.
- Be a guest speaker at your reader group (either in person or via speaker phone).
- Send promo items for your customers.
- Donate books for charity fundraisers.
- Meet your regional managers when they are in town to promote romance to your superiors.

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Article first appeared in *Romance Sells*, a publication of Romance Writers of America.

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Conversely, published authors will love you if you:

- Call them before their books are stripped. They might want to buy the books for themselves, or be willing to purchase the books over the phone and allow you to donate them to a good cause.
- Shelve their books face out.
- Institute a “local authors” section in your store and feature their books.
- Order their own books for them slightly above cost.

Getting to know your local published romance authors is a great way to stimulate sales in your romance section and to be first in line when the published authors are looking for a venue to do signings and other book events. The relationship between bookseller and author is symbiotic and necessary for both to succeed. Take the first step and try to get to know local romance authors. And who knows—if one of the authors hits it big, you might find yourself on a preferred list for appearances! ~**SBond**