



# Report to the Board of Trustees

April 1, 2020

## From the Director

The month of March began with a seemingly routine Town Department Head meeting on the COVID-19 virus. At that time, there were no confirmed cases in CT and the East Shore Health District was monitoring residents who had traveled from China and Italy and were self-quarantined.

I attended a focus group meeting for BCTV and the Rotary Club was able to complete the installation of their information kiosk. We also received and installed our new scanner purchased by the Friends.

By the second week of March, there were a few confirmed cases of the virus in Fairfield County, CT. By Friday, March 13, most libraries in CT were closed to the public. With the realization that morning that just about all libraries in the towns surrounding Branford were closed, I consulted with Board President Polly Fitz, First Selectman Jamie Cosgrove, and WWML Library Director Alice Pentz before closing the Blackstone Library. Had we not closed, we would have risked being overwhelmed with patrons coming in from other libraries along with our own residents.

From March 16—20, there was no consensus as to



*Our hashtag for social media during COVID-19*

whether libraries should be closed, offer home delivery or curbside service. That week, our staff practiced social distancing within the building as they worked on special projects and prepared for the possibility that work would be conducted remotely, or in the building on staggered schedules for the next few weeks. Staff were, and are available by phone and email throughout the week.

By March 23, Governor Lamont had ordered non essential businesses to close and staff began a combination of working from home and some hours in the building.

Staff are getting acclimated with the Zoom remote conferencing app and Slack, an app that streamlines communications among teams. We had our first zoom meeting on March 26 and everyone was able to connect. Miss Carly and Miss Mary held their very first digital storytime on March 28.

We have been registering new patrons, extending expired library cards and help-

ing with digital media. The reference staff are taking phone appointments for tech help. Miss Sarah created a social distancing challenge for our teens & adults and our social media crew are increasing posts to highlight digital resources.

We have purchased additional copies of Overdrive ebooks for which Blackstone patrons will have priority, and increased the monthly limit for HOOPLA and Kanopy from 5 to 10 per month. We are also keeping up with book orders so that our collection will be current when we reopen.

Eloise Owens, our Yale SOM fellow, and I spoke on the phone on March 25 and are forging ahead with the LSTA planning grant application.

We've lowered the temperature in the building to conserve energy and are checking the book drop daily. The building is being thoroughly cleaned. Staff are receiving and processing book orders so that we'll have current titles when we re-open.

*Karen Jensen*



You can still find your place at the library—virtually! National Library Week is April 19—25.

## Highlights from the Youth Services Department—February

Our tweens were able to take center stage this month by putting together our annual “Blind Date with a Book” display. The display is a variety of staff recommendations from our adult fiction and non-fiction collections. Once staff members submit their recommendations our tween advisory council turns into a workshop of Christmas elves, busily wrapping each title and writing the barcode outside of the book so that patrons won’t know what book they chose till they unwrap them at home. Once the display was up and running we could not keep the books on the shelves which is a testament to their ability to wrap and create a “good looking” display. To my surprise, everyone wanted to participate in this project and could not wait to grab the next book to wrap! Plus, they got to see how popular their display was since books were flying off the display shelf.

Sarah worked hard this month compiling a list of recommended titles for a high school English class. The class is an elective and focuses on reading and how/why we are drawn to do so. The teacher came up with a couple of categories including: reading to learn, to connect or to escape. Sarah took those categories and compiled a list of popular titles with diverse characters and situations that would fit the bill! Once the list was complete she visited the class to talk a little about each book, our teen department and how they could place titles on hold. She also made everyone a library card so that they could search our catalog and digital collection

from home. She said that the class was excited to meet her and were busily marking which titles they wanted to dive into. It will be interesting to recap at the end of the semester and see which titles did and did not work, what reads were most popular and whether or not they will offer the class in the future.

Mary participated in the Branford Early Childhood Collaborative’s Preschool Fair. The fair takes place every year and brings preschools and early childhood providers together so that families can learn a little about each school at once. Mary joined Wendy from Willoughby Wallace Library shared a table to promote library resources. Mary also handed out copies of *Nature’s Royal Tea Party* by local author Cheryl Kling as a giveaway.

Our grant through the Allan Louis Loeb Foundation made it possible for us to have backyard maple “sugarer” Donna Dione visit from the Children’s Museum in Southeastern Connecticut. Donna has been tapping her maple trees for over twenty years and has been sharing her experiences with people of all ages at the children’s museum. During this program Donna touched on the history of maple sugaring and how Native Americans used it to create sugar. She showed kids the tools that she uses and they read a story about the process. Families closed the program by comparing her maple syrup to store bought and of course her syrup won! In all my years of being here we have never had a program

on maple sugaring and it’s funny since there are quite a few sugar houses in Connecticut. Being able to talk about something that is made in CT reminds families of all the things our state has to offer.

Every early release day the Youth Services Department offers a different activity. Sometimes we do things with technology, like learning to 3D print. Last month we did canvas painting. This month we tried a group building exercise called the “Sugar Cube Challenge.” I found this challenge randomly online and let me tell you I did not know what kind of draw it would pull in. The point of the challenge is to create the tallest tower possible with sugar cubes, but here is the catch - participants must work in pairs where one person is blindfolded and building and the other person is calling directions in hope of building up! When I told the kids that we were putting together a little competition our programming room filled with interested faces. Once we explained the challenge they got super excited and started pairing off, deciding who would be the blindfolded builder and who would be the designer or reciter. We also found a designated timer and the kids went at it! Calling positions, building and then switching partners. Seeing everyone work together was a delight and no one tore anyone down for not building fast enough or having the tallest tower - if anything they built each other up which was a great way to end the day.

Carly Lemire



Our new AWE Early Learning Station

## Service During Covid-19

While our building is closed, we are actively and creatively working behind the scenes to fulfill our mission to *provide essential access to information, resources and unique shared experiences to help ensure Branford is an educated and enriched community.*

You may continue to contact us by phone at **203.488.1441**

and email. We have extended all expiring library cards until June 1st and no books are due back to the library until we reopen.

Our reference staff are available at **extension 318** to help with all your questions, and are taking phone appointments for tech help.

On the digital front, we have

purchased additional copies of Overdrive eBooks and increased the monthly limit for HOOPLA and Kanopy – resources sponsored in part by our Friends of the Library.

**www.blackstonelibrary.org** is the best place to discover all of the resources available from home.

## Highlights from the Reference Department-February

This month, I'd like to focus on the broad selection of genealogy resources that the library offers. We have both print and digital resources, some available to search from home and others available from within the library.

For patrons researching in the library, we offer access to Ancestrylibrary.com and Americanancestors.com. Patrons can use the computers in the PC lab or their own laptops; when using our WiFi connection, patrons are authenticated by our external database providers. In addition, the library is an affiliate of Family Search which means that many resources of Family Search that are not viewable from home can be accessed here at the library.

The library also offers a wide variety of local records for genealogical research. We have a large collection of information on Branford town and family history including census records, city directories, Branford family genealo-

gies, Branford High School Yearbooks (1925 – present, missing 1933 and 1934), church histories, maps, military titles, municipal records, newsletters from local organizations, vital records indexes, photographs and slides. We also provide an online index to the Historical Society's photograph collection.

The library has a large collection of archives that include letters, diaries, articles, family papers, business papers, ledgers, information on clubs and organizations and much more. In addition to the library's archives, the Historical Society's archives are also housed in the new Archives Room at the library. There is a finding list available online so that patrons can do a fair amount of research before visiting the library.

For patrons wishing to gather information about the history of their home, we have an Architectural Survey that was

completed in 1986 with photographs, descriptions and history on Branford's older homes.

Available both within the library and from home are the Branford History Digital Scrapbooks. This resource is a digitized collection of the thousands of local articles that have been gathered by librarians over many years and first microfilmed and then digitized. (The actual scrapbooks, dating back to the late 1890's, are located in the Branford History Room.)

All of our reference librarians are available to assist patrons with their local history and genealogy questions. We can also contact our Town Historian, Jane Bouley, for additional assistance if we are not able to answer a patron's question. We are working with Jane on digitizing a number of our archives and will make them available on our computers and/or online at some point in the future.



Ancestry Library is temporarily available at home.



James Blackstone Memorial Library  
758 Main Street  
Branford, CT 06405

203.488.1441  
reference@blackstonelibrary.org  
facebook.com/blackstone\_library  
twitter.com/blackstonelib  
www.blackstonelibrary.org

...more than books

Join our email list for more information about programs  
www.blackstonelibrary.org

## April 2020 Program Highlights

We are evaluating programs scheduled for April to determine whether they can be held via Zoom meeting and teleconferencing software.

So far, we have...

### Saturday Stories Live Saturdays, 10:30am

Join us every Saturday at 10:30 AM from the comfort of your couch for stories, songs and finger plays with Miss Mary and Carly. *For children and their caregivers.*

### Knitting Group Wednesdays, 6:00 pm

Join us for conversation and share what you are working on. *For adults.*

### Branford Forum Presents: The Wolf at the Door: The Menace of Economic Insecurity and How to Fight It Sunday, April 5 2:00-3:30 pm.

Americans face economic hardship but respond with fantastical solutions, from tax-cut magic to ending capitalism. This program will focus on what truly worries people: their own insecurity. It will include concrete reforms affecting jobs, unemployment, health care, and wages as well as strategies to achieve change. This program is presented by Ian Shapiro, JD, PhD, Sterling Professor of Political Science at Yale University.

### Books & (BYOB) Brews Wednesday, April 8 6:00 — 8:00 pm

Each month, Books & Brews offers 2 titles to choose from, each with its own discussion group to take part in. This month, choose from *Bunny* by Mona Awad, or *Thank you for Smoking* by Christopher Buckley.

To participate, visit [zoom.us](https://zoom.us) on your computer, download the zoom app on your device. The app works best with a camera, but you can simply call in by phone, too.

*Check the program listings on our website for the links/codes for specific programs. Any new programs will also be listed on our website and social media.*

*Check our website for more programs! Programs with \* require registration.*

## February 2020 Statistics—Deirdre Santora

**Total Circulation: 9,720**  
*February 2019: 10,132*

**borrowIT: 2,734**  
*February 2019: 2,270*

**Renewals: 6,319**

**Downloadable Circulation:**  
Overdrive eBooks: 1068  
Overdrive audiobooks: 585  
RB Digital: 347  
Hoopla: 547 plays  
Kanopy: 156 plays  
Pronunciator: 481 users

### Children's Programs:

*Babies (0-2)*  
11 programs/164 attendance

*Preschool (3-5)*  
14 programs/181 attendance

*School-age (6-11)*  
4 programs/20 attendance

*All Ages*  
0 programs/0 attendance

**Total Children's Programs: 29**  
**Total Attendance: 365**

**Teen Programs (12+)**  
21 programs/201 attendance

### Adult programs

16 programs/195 attendance

**Hammer & Conference Room**  
103 meetings/298 attendance

**Computer Sessions: 1,568**

**Facebook: 1,820 Likes**

**MailChimp: 7,830 subscribers**

**Days Open: 28**

**Daily Attendance: 463**