Report to the Board of Trustees

July 7, 2021

From the Director

Our strategic planning team has begun conducting our community conversations, and are collecting the data. Once the data is collected, we will work with Innovation Builders to analyze and interpret the data. Some initial indicators of the conversations are that people really love the library and the building and they are looking for ways to be involved. We have also had some comments indicating a desire for more expert-led programs.

We have also heard that people still appreciate being able to attend programs via zoom, when they are unable to come to the library. While we hoped to have the conversations completed by the end of June, recruitment has been a challenge, and we are working hard to schedule more groups for July.

Trustee Michelle Blank contributed to a press release about the library’s 125th anniversary, which ran in The Sound and the Shoreline Times on June 17. The press release included the 125th logo. We also used the logo in a presentation to the Friends at their annual meeting, and we will incorporate it into our marketing materials.

The Friends’ annual meeting was held in person on June 15th. There was a reception afterwards that made use of the new Cosgrove Terrace. The chairs for the terrace have been delivered, and the tables are expected by June 29.

The new social justice book discussion group was a success, with 20 members in attendance at each of 3 weekly sessions in June. Volunteer Linda Packard did an exceptional job of facilitating the conversation. July’s book is I’m Still Here by Austin Channing Brown.

The Community Foundation for Greater New Haven held an online training session presented by the Racial Equity Institute, called the Groundwater Approach, which outlined the systems that support racism. The program presented stunning statistics that showed how Black people in our country are at a consistent disadvantage. It was helpful to gain a better understanding of the challenges that many of our patrons are still facing. As an institution that serves the entire community, I feel it is important to continue educating ourselves about racial inequity.

The new AC chiller has arrived and work is tentatively scheduled for early July. The self-checkout machine is up and running to the delight and convenience of our patrons.

Finally, we used surveys from Project Outcome to evaluate selected programs in May and have more surveys scheduled to go out after June programs.

Karen Jensen
May was a busy month in Youth Services! As you know, Miss Carly left at the end of April to begin her family leave, and we were very excited to welcome a healthy baby boy named Wesley as the youngest honorary member of Blackstone’s staff. During Miss Carly’s absence, Miss Mary is continuing to run story time with Miss Sarah’s help, and they have both taken over running some special children’s programs to ensure the calendar continues as planned. Miss Carol has added extra hours in the department to cover staffing shortages at the desk, which would have usually been covered by Carly. Miss Sarah is continuing to order teen materials. Children’s materials that would have been ordered by Carly are currently being selected by Miss Mary and orders are being organized and submitted by Miss Sarah so Patricia can process them.

Special programs this month in Children’s Services included a Mother’s Day story time and a water conservation program. Special programs in Teen Services included a Teen Game Night and a Nailed It! cooking event. The cooking program was run by Miss Sarah with the help of Terri Torres and her two daughters, who volunteered to share a family recipe. Teens who signed up received a shopping list in advance, and everyone cooked together at the same time in a live version of a Food Network program, making their own vanilla milkshakes and cheesy chicken enchiladas. Not only was the program well received, but some of the ingredients for the event—fresh scallions and garlic—were on the list of plants we grew last month in our teen gardening program. It was so rewarding to see three of the teens in attendance were able to harvest their own scallions and green garlic from our April event and use that in their recipe!

Both of our special teen programs this month took place in the library’s Virtual Teen Space, which is one of the positives that has come out of the pandemic, as it has provided local teens with an online forum in which to share poetry, art, and book recommendations, as well as a place to receive updates from the library and to participate in programs. It has become, overwhelmingly, the main way our teens reach out for information from the library, as many of them already have the app installed on their phones. We updated the online behavior policy agreement this month for this Teen Space, asking teens to provide contact information for their parents and to promise to follow library rules even in virtual spaces.

Finally, our spring Take & Make series concluded this month with a Pipe Cleaner Dragons craft for children and a Wildflower Suncatchers craft for teens. In total, we made 40 craft kits but, thanks to repeat watchers and social media shares, the videos we created for this month’s crafts were viewed a total of 77 times (and counting!). The Take & Make program has been so popular that we will be expanding it for the summer to include craft kits for adults, as well as for children and teens. Miss Sarah will be organizing the craft kits with the help of Miss Mary, Jenna Anthony in Reference, and Katy McNicol.

Live program attendance for the month of May was 108 with additional views of recorded programs of 77, for total attendance in Youth Services of 185.

-Sarah Mallory
125th Anniversary—The Bird Collection

We get lots of questions about the bird collection and it’s no wonder! The collection was extremely impressive and represented many different types of local species. According to our archives, the core of the collection was provided by Valdimar Hammer and the taxidermist was Mr. Armstrong of Pawson Park here in Branford. We were certainly sad to see them go, but we know they found a great home at Earthplace Nature Discovery Center in Westport CT, a non-profit organization committed to building passion and respect for the natural world and a more sustainable future. There, the collection continues to educate and inspire a new generation of animal enthusiasts!

Highlights from the Reference Department—May

We continue to have good attendance and a positive response to our programs, with patrons attending from all over the country. In May, we had Latin classes, Poetry discussions, book groups, our knitting group is meeting on the library grounds now that the weather is warmer, we had another well attended game night, a program on Birdscaping – creating garden habitats to attract birds, Branford Forum and a Cutting the Cord program.

Anne has been busy scanning some of our assorted collections of newspaper clippings. Included in these scans are newspaper clippings on Senator Lucy T. Hammer’s career, the 350th celebration of the town of Branford (1994) and on the trolley in Branford from its beginnings. These are presently stored locally, but they are included in our list of possible uploads to the Digital Archives or regular library website.

Jenna completed organizing the library manuscript and article collection; she organized them into six archival storage boxes with a finding aid for each box. She has been working on and assisting with new book groups, hosting two of them and creating new book club sets. Jenna is planning new programs for the Fall and makes sure that our current ones are ready to go on Zoom, with publicity in place and someone to host the Zoom sessions. She continues to add new photographs, descriptions and metadata to the Digital Archive.

Christina has been very busy with the Community Webs project, an IMLS funded effort to preserve local websites. She attends a number of sessions each month to learn all of the technical aspects of the project, of which there are many, and she has begun running test crawls on our initial group of websites, to analyze them, ensure that they are being captured correctly and prepare them for public access. She had six tech help appointments this month - how to use Zoom, Windows 10 & browser navigation, Gmail and Yahoo accounts, Apple ID/iCloud, Gmail troubleshooting and JobNow/resume assistance.

Debby is working with both Christina and Jenna on the archival projects. She also attended the virtual New England Regional Genealogical Conference and viewed programs on New England probate research, DNA (understanding the science, testing, and how to implement in genealogy), New England Maps, Irish Ancestors, Connecticut Vital Records, New England land records, and more. Debby purchased new bookshelves from IKEA for our board games collection, now stored in the side room of the auditorium; we are all looking forward to the day we can have our Game Night in person again. (Jenna put all three bookshelves together for us!)

Everyone attended CLA sessions - many thanks to the Friends who covered the cost of our attendance.

-Deborah Trofatter
July 2021 Virtual Program Highlights

Virtual Game Night
July 2 @ 6 - 9:00 pm
Join us for a night of silly online games with some fun, laid-back people, without having to leave the house! Get all the info you need and RSVP Meetup page. For adults of all experience levels.

Education in the Grotesque: Gargoyles of Yale University
July 14 @ 7 - 8:30 pm
The Branford Historical Society presents a lecture by Matthew Duman highlighting a selection of gargoyles and grotesques found throughout the buildings of Yale University’s campus in New Haven, CT. Using original photographs from his book, An Education in the Grotesque, he explores the artistic, historic, architectural, and even humorous significance of these decorative sculptures, as well as their role in communicating the identity of Yale University as a place of learning and enlightenment.

Ovenbirds and Wood Thrush, Research, and the CT Bird Atlas: Presented by DEEP
July 8 @ 6 - 7:00 pm
Connecticut is completing a three-year project for The Connecticut Bird Atlas. This undertaking combined efforts of the public with DEEP and University researchers to tabulate the populations of all birds found here in Connecticut. Two species, the Ovenbird and Wood Thrush, will be highlighted by Min Huang, Wildlife Biologist and one of the Coordinators of the atlas project.

Start, Manage, & Grow Your Business with Reference Solutions
July 29 @ 6 - 7:00 pm
Are you interested in learning about new technologies to help you start or grow your own business? Guest speaker TJ Pridell with Reference Solutions will host an interactive, lead-generation marketing seminar catering to the Branford business community. Reference Solutions, an online provider of business and consumer research is offered free to the public through the Blackstone Library—it’s an invaluable resource for business owners, sales & marketing representatives and job seekers!

Best Seller Book Club
July 31 @ 3:30 - 4:30 pm
This month we’re reading Klara and the Sun by Kazuo Ishiguro. A limited number of copies are available for book club participants. Sponsored by the Friends of the Blackstone Library.

May 2021 Statistics

Total Circulation: 4,850
May 2020: 1,338

borrowIT: 1,080
April 2020: 246
Renewals: 3,900

Computer Sessions: 219
WIFI Logins: 1,317

Facebook: 1980 Likes
Instagram: 1031 Followers
MailChimp: 7,618

Downloadable Circulation:
Overdrive ebooks: 1558
Overdrive audiobooks: 694
Overdrive magazines: 206
HOOPLA: 1014
Kanopy: 337
Pronunciator: 567
Ancestry Library: 2301 searches
Total Downloadable: 6,677

Children’s Programs
14 programs/70 attendance

Teen Programs (12+)
4 programs/38 attendance

Adult programs
27 programs/324 attendance

Lucy Hammer Room N/A
Conference Room N/A

Days Open: 25
Average Daily Visitors: N/A