

Brooks Free Library Board of Trustees
Annual Meeting with Board of Selectmen
Nov. 17, 2014

The Board of Trustees is pleased to report that use of Library services continues to grow. Last year a record 237,565 items were checked out, a 56% increase in circulation in the last 10 years. Use of our Reference services and public technology access remains strong. In FY14 we provided 906 educational, cultural, informational and recreational programs free of charge to community members of all ages, with a program attendance of 13,086.

While checking out books and materials remains a staple service, we've also seen tremendous growth in recent years in activities that aren't captured in traditional measures of library use. Residents and visitors come to the Library to read newspapers and magazines, participate in story-times or book discussion groups, ask a reference question, use the computers or attend a concert, presentation or lecture. The fastest growing area of Library use is the use of electronic resources. For example, downloading e-books, audiobooks and music, or accessing electronic resources such as Consumer Reports, Ancestry.com, Heritage Quest, Mango Languages, as well as databases that provide free full-text access to the content of newspapers, popular magazines and academic journals. The Library is a community-gathering place and serves community members from all demographic groups – families with young children, seniors, working adults, elementary, high school and college students, people with disabilities, job seekers, non-native English speakers, and residents who are homebound.

This year, one of our biggest challenges was the move of the Middle School to Chatham. We were concerned about losing our close relationship with the teachers and, because of transportation difficulties, a declining number of Middle School students using the Library after school. We've been proactive to ensure that didn't happen, so we could continue to support the children and families of Harwich. We focused a lot of attention on building relationships with new school administrators and maintaining contacts with Middle School teachers so that we could continue to collaborate and support the education of Harwich students.

In previous years, about half of the middle schoolers coming to the Library would take the bus. The rest would walk, but that is no longer an option. The Middle School administration and Cape Destinations, the bus company, were very receptive to our concerns, however, and worked with us to ensure this would not be a problem. Middle School students are able to take the bus to the Library after school and we're also a stop on the late bus. The bus arrangements have worked out extremely well, and rather than seeing the numbers of youngsters using the library after school decline, our joint efforts have resulted in increased attendance.

When we re-designed our open hours in 2005, one of the primary considerations was being able to serve children and youth and working-age people with early evening hours on weekdays. We're open until 7 pm on Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays. Students in grade 5 and above are able to come to the Library without a caregiver and get picked up by their parents on their way home from work. The hours between school dismissal and dinnertime are when young teens and tweens are most at risk. The Library provides a safe, welcoming environment,

with a Homework Center, computers, and lots of engaging activities and special after -school programs.

In addition, when we learned last spring the new Monomoy Regional School District schedules would include a 45-minute early release every other Wednesday, we decided to offer Early Release Movies on those Wednesdays, a flexible type of program that would allow us to accommodate a large and varying number of students. The early release Wednesdays have been the most popular day after-school, precisely because of the childcare gap it created for many families. Often we have had 40 middle schoolers here on those days. Interestingly, many do not watch the movie, but have been engaged in other productive activities, doing their homework, working together on group projects for school, others using the computers and playing board games. On alternate Wednesdays, our Teen Library Corps meets to do activities that support the library and plan programs for children and youth. On Tuesday afternoons we continue to offer the very popular “Lego Free-play” program, and on Thursday afternoon we have a new program this fall, “HJT Explorers.” Using trust funds, we are paying Harwich Junior Theatre staff members to lead free drama and theatre arts workshops for the students who come here after school. We’ve been very excited about this collaborative effort, which has reinvigorated a long-standing partnership between the Library and Harwich Junior Theatre.

Also this year, we have expanded our STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Math) focus with the addition of Science Story-times, the inter-generational “Engineering Challenges” offered once a month on Saturdays so the whole family can participate. For the pre-schoolers we included the Arts in STEAM – with a Little Hands Art program on Saturdays last winter and spring. As the weather turns colder, we’ll begin offering Saturday programs for toddlers and pre-schoolers to give working parents the opportunity to attend with their children.

Another initiative this year has been in the area of emergency preparedness. Library Director Ginny Hewitt is a member of COSTEP Massachusetts (Coordinated State-wide Emergency Preparedness), a statewide committee working to ensure that Massachusetts’ cultural heritage and historic records and assets are better protected in a disaster. Working with Emergency Management Director Lee Culver, Ginny began the COSTEP Harwich initiative, the first in southeastern Massachusetts. The initial meeting in January brought representatives of the Harwich cultural and historic community together with first responders and emergency management to begin working together on planning and preparing for disasters, and to provide training in recovery techniques so as much material as possible can be salvaged after a disaster. In May, we hosted a full day workshop on identifying hazards and evaluating and mitigating risks as the first step in effective disaster preparedness planning. In October, we held another full day workshop that focused on fire prevention and salvaging wet documents and materials. Ginny is now serving as the Cultural Resource Triage Officer on the Harwich Emergency Management Team. Next month we will hold a COSTEP Harwich meeting to solidify the local organization and plan future activities and trainings.

The Library continues to work with the Chamber of Commerce to support local businesses and promote economic development. In addition to the full slate of year round and summer programs that make Harwich an attractive destination for visitors, the Library provides a number of the events for Fall for Harwich and Christmas in Harwich. This year Library Director Ginny Hewitt is serving as co-chair of the joint Town and Chamber Branding Committee. We

are also working with the Chamber and Cape Destinations of the first ever Polar Express in Harwich for the Christmas in Harwich weekend. Cape Destinations trolleys will bring children and families back and forth from the Visitors Center to the Library on the evening of Saturday, Dec. 6th for a reading of this children's classic and other special activities.

Coming up, we're coordinating Harwich's first "Community Read" this winter and spring. Two books have been selected: Barbara Kingsolver's Animal, Vegetable, Mineral; A Year of Food Life and Frances Hodgson Burnett's classic The Secret Garden. We're partnering with the Harwich Cultural Council, Harwich Junior Theatre, Chase Library, the Harwich Conservation Administrator, the Agricultural Commission, the Harwich Conservation Trust, Historical Society and others for this series. The series is being finalized now and full details will be available shortly.

This year we have greatly expanded the technology assistance we provide to the public. In January we began our "Book A Librarian" program, where community members can make one-on-one ½ hour appointments for help with their technology-related questions. Our "e-Book Help" sessions on Saturdays remain very popular and this fall we began a Wednesday evening "Device Advice" drop-in program. We now offer regular "Tech Talks", with topics such as Email Basics, Gmail and Google Drive, iPad Basics, Kindle Fire, and iOS 101 for beginners. These group workshops fill up quickly and often develop waiting lists. This fall we began offering "Technology and Tea" at the Council on Aging after the congregated meal program on Tuesdays to help seniors with their technology questions and we're now doing a regular "Tech Talk" segment on Channel 18's Community Journal program.

We continue to offer one-on-one instruction in the use of assistive technology for people with sight loss through our VITAL Program (Vision Impaired Technology Assistance at the Library.) One of the fastest growing areas is teaching people with sight loss to use the digital audiobook download service from the National Library Service. This year we are partnering with the Perkins Library, Perkins Products and Mass. Board of Library Commissioners to develop a handbook on establishing an instructional program modeled after VITAL, to be distributed to libraries across Massachusetts. In May, Carla Burke, our Assistive Technology Coordinator and Ginny will be presenting a workshop at the Mass. Library Association's annual conference.

Progress is being made for needed upgrades and preservation of our historic building. This year, we received the funding needed for our re-carpeting project. Planning for that project is well underway. More details will be forthcoming, but we are anticipating the Library may need to be closed for several weeks in late winter or early spring while this work is done. We are also making progress on beginning the historic preservation study of the Brooks Block and original bank building and anticipate having the study completed in the next few months.

The Trustees would like to once again express our appreciation for the Selectmen's leadership in establishing the Facilities Maintenance Manager position, and to congratulate Lincoln Hooper on his choice of Sean Libby to fill that position. In addition to being extremely knowledgeable, Sean is pro-active and responsive to our needs. He immediately began working with us to resolve complex issues with the Library's major building systems. Our facilities problems have not been resolved overnight, but filling this position was an important first step in

improving the maintenance of Town facilities. The investment taxpayers have made in those facilities is now much better protected.

Finally, we will be re-submitting our request for the funding to re-open on Mondays in FY16. This request is not for a new level of service – it is to **restore** Mondays as an open day of operation. Ten years ago, in 2005, we lost Mondays as an open day when we volunteered not to be included in the second override. We were the only department to do so. Through careful and thoughtful planning, the Library has continued to respond to changing community needs and interests, and use of the library has continued to grow despite the reduced hours and days of operation. Although the funds were not available last year, we appreciated the positive reception this request received from the Selectmen and Finance Committee. We realize that funding is tight with some unusual challenges for FY16, but would like to thank you for making re-opening of the Library on Monday a priority in the FY16 budget.

Respectfully Submitted,

Brooks Free Library Board of Trustees

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