

Brooks Free Library

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Board of Trustees Annual Meeting with Board of Selectmen Nov. 28, 2016

The Board of Trustees would like to begin our annual report by expressing our appreciation for the support we've received this year from the Selectmen, Town officials and the community. It's been a very challenging year as we were closed to the public three times for extended periods when the emergency light inverter failed. But it's also been a very rewarding year. Staff members maintained a positive attitude and approached this as a real life exercise in emergency preparedness – how to deal with an unexpected event and continue to serve the community. We moved equipment, shelves and materials and opened a “Library in the Lobby” so patrons could pick up items on hold and choose materials from a small browsing collection. We moved our programs and held story-times, book groups, writers groups and after-school activities in other locations. We are extremely grateful to the Community Center and Cape Cod Theatre Company for hosting our re-located programs.

We were surprised and pleased with the response from the community to the closings and reduced services. Patrons were understandably frustrated that full services weren't available, but we also received a huge outpouring of support. They let us know that they valued and missed full library services and were very appreciative of our efforts to provide as much service as we could. The positive feedback from the community made a tremendous difference to staff members as they worked in difficult circumstances.

The two week closing this summer occurred at the height of busy season and presented unusual challenges. Reducing the impact on the Summer Reading program was a top priority. We created a “lobby” space at the Main St. entrance to Children's Room so children, tweens and teens would have a wide selection of reading materials to choose from. The two school-year closings - last October and this year in Sept. - presented different challenges. The after-school hours are when unsupervised youth are most at risk, so we created our Homework Center and for more than 15 years we've offered special activities on weekday afternoons. We're also open until 7 on weekdays so parents can pick their youngsters up on the way home from work. When these closings occurred we were committed to ensuring that parents of middle schoolers weren't left with a child care gap. We used the Cape Cod Theater Company's HJT Arts Center last October and a room in the Community Center this September. Parents were extremely grateful to have this option. We'd also like to thank Monomoy Schools for notifying families about the changes and Cape Destinations bus company for working with us and modifying their drop-off locations.

With building maintenance fully centralized as of July 1st, the remainder of our report focuses on library services.

Technology Assistance:

This year we have continued to offer drop-in eBook Help and Device Advice sessions. Device Advice is currently being offered twice a week, on Wednesdays and Saturdays.

Last winter we began offering Book-A-Librarian sessions, half hour one-on-one appointments where a staff member assists patrons with questions about our electronic resources and other technology or research related topics. This program quickly became one of our most popular and it was difficult to meet the demand. We had to suspend Book-A-Librarian for the busy summer but we're now in the process of bringing it back. We're training additional staff members to provide this service so we can offer more appointments when the program starts up again in January. We will also be resuming our digital literacy outreach efforts with the Council on Aging and Pine Oaks with monthly coffee and technology sessions.

Our Tech Talks are offered on Saturdays so working people can participate. The next one is on Saturday, Dec. 3 and is an intermediate level iOS workshop. In January we're offering an iOS Part I and Part II on two consecutive Saturdays. This fall we started an iOS Users group for people who already know the basics of how to use their iPhone or iPad and want to share tips and tricks or favorite apps.

We're currently in the process of establishing a new technology program, Internet Navigators. Many employers now require job applications be submitted online, even for positions that don't require technology skills. Many government agencies also require requests for assistance to be filed online. While our staff members are always willing to help patrons with technology, time doesn't always allow the detailed one-on-one assistance less tech savvy patrons need to accomplish these tasks. Community members without the skills to complete these functions independently are falling through the cracks. Our new service will match these patrons with trained volunteers who will guide them through these tasks. This program is about helping the patron get where they need to go, which is why we chose the term Navigators. The volunteers won't help people develop the content of the job application, for example. They will help the patron learn how to get to the website, fill out and submit the application, file an unemployment claim or other request for service and learn to send and receive email. We're recruiting volunteers now and developing the training curriculum. Training will take occur in January and we expect to begin offering this service in February.

VITAL Program:

Our innovative Vision Impaired Technology Assistance at the Library (VITAL) program provides individualized one-on-one instruction in the use of assistive technology to people with vision loss. Instruction in the accessibility features of iOS devices is the fastest growing area of the program, along with BARD digital download of audiobooks from the Library of Congress.

Assistive Technology Coordinator Carla Burke continues to innovate and find new ways to improve library services for people with vision loss and to enrich the lives of sighted and non-sighted members of the community. We are pleased to report that her work has been recognized this year with two prestigious awards. In March Carla received an Outstanding Service Award from the Bay State Council of the Blind. In June she received the Carroll Society Award from the Carroll Center for the Blind and the Mass. Commission for the Blind.

In May three Brooks Free Library staff members presented a workshop at the Mass. Library Association's Annual Conference about our VITAL program. This year we continued to collaborate with the Perkins School for the Blind and Perkins Products writing a handbook detailing how libraries can provide services for people with vision loss. The handbook should be published soon and will be distributed to all Mass. public libraries.

Last year we reported that the Commissioner of the Mass. Commission for the Blind (MCB) was so impressed by our VITAL program that he formed a working group with our Assistive Technology

Coordinator and staff members from other state agencies to investigate funding sources to establish instructional programs in other areas of the state. We're pleased to report that through the efforts of this working group funds were provided to the Mass. Council on Aging (MCOA) which offered three year grants to establish assistive technology training centers in three senior centers. The non-profit Mass. Association for the Blind (MAB) has partnered with MCOA and is providing additional funding to two of the sites to double the number of hours for their coordinators. No senior centers on the Cape were selected to receive these grant funds, unfortunately, but MAB has recently indicated they are interested in partnering with us and providing additional support for our program. This is very welcome news since our coordinator is only budgeted for 9 hours per week and the demand for services far exceeds what can be accomplished with those hours. We hope to have good news to announce regarding this partnership in the next few months.

Library-School Collaboration:

During the past year Youth Services Librarian Ann Carpenter has greatly expanded the number of visits to the Harwich Elementary School. This fall Ann is conducting 14 classroom visits each week. She reads a book and does book talks about a variety of fiction and non-fiction books, which she leaves in the classroom for the week. The visits are intended to more closely integrate the library and the school, to provide students with access to more diverse reading materials and to create a culture of reading. Ann is partnering with Elementary School Librarian Sarah Idman on a Mock Caldecott Award program with the fourth graders. Ann is reading the award contenders during her classroom visits and students will have mock sessions to choose the winners in January.

Also new this year, this summer was the first time the Harwich Elementary School and Brooks Free Library partnered on the Summer Reading Program. This increased participation in our program and encouraged youngsters to continue to read and learn over the summer.

This fall several of our staff members served book discussion group leaders for Monomoy Regional High School's summer reading program.

We are continuing to support the education of our children and youth by including a STEM (Science Technology Engineering and Math) focus in many of our programs. We offer a weekly Science Story-time for pre-schoolers. Our Middle School Makers program on Tuesday afternoons and our monthly Engineering Challenge on Saturdays continue to be very popular. This fall we have begun a new Basics of Coding program for middle-schoolers on Wednesday afternoons. We also encourage interest in the arts with weekly drama workshops for middle and high school students, Creative Movement for pre-schoolers and Mother Goose on the Loose music and movement programs for our youngest patrons. During the winter month we offer a Little Hands Art program for toddlers and young pre-schoolers on Saturday mornings.

This year we have expanded our support to homeschoolers by adding to the Thursday morning book discussion group and the activity club. We are now leading two teams of homeschoolers working on the academically challenging Odyssey of the Mind national competition.

Public Computers

Last fall we upgraded the technology in our Homework Center, replacing the desktop computers with Chromebooks, which Monomoy students are using in the high school. Following the completion of that project, we have concentrated over the past year on upgrading the technology for adults. About a decade ago, when we couldn't afford the \$20,000 - \$30,000 time and print management systems offered by vendors, we developed a successful system of inexpensive

software and Windows configurations to control patron time and activity and to limit the unrecouped cost of printing. This system worked well for a long time but in recent years had begun to create difficulties for patrons doing normal online activities. Reference Librarian Jennifer Pickett investigated various options and she and Assistant Director Emily Milan selected a new system called Useful to manage the public computers. For a modest one-time investment, under \$7000, patrons have a greatly improved experience and the need for staff intervention has been greatly reduced. The new system uses thin clients, so configuration changes can now be done centrally. The system works well with the OCS print management system that KenMark installed last spring. KenMark invested in the software and printer/copier. They keep the income but we are not responsible for paying for maintenance or supplies.

On-going Programs for Adults

The Library has a Morning book group, Evening Book Group, Literary Diners and a Greatest Generation Book Group, a weekly Knit-Lit group, daytime Writers Group, a Memoir Writers Group as well Scrapbooking and Mah Jong groups. This year we have added to these on-going programs with a new Evening Writers Group led by staff member Jack Sheedy and a Spring and Fall "Fiction 101" workshop series led by staff member Corey Farrenkoph.

Electronic Resources

Our CLAMS subscription to Overdrive eBooks and eAudio remains extremely popular, though given the higher costs and the restrictions from vendors and publishers, it is difficult for libraries to meet the demand. This year patrons are taking advantage of a new source of free eBooks and eAudiobooks called the Commonwealth eBook Collection. A service of the Mass. Library System, this new cooperative is provide a larger selection of titles as well as, through group buying power, is intended to try to influence publishers and vendors to make more titles available to libraries and at a reasonable cost. In addition, any Mass. resident is eligible for an eCard from the Boston Public Library. The card can be applied for online and used to download eBooks from BPL's Overdrive collection. Links to all three sources of eBooks and eAudio can be found on our webpage.

Brooks Free Library subscribes to electronic resources such as Newsbank Boston Metro for free access to a database of articles from the Cape Cod Chronicle, Cape Codder, Cape Cod Times and other Mass. newspapers. The Mass. Board of Library Commissioners provides free state-wide access to articles from the Boston Globe, New York Times, Wall Street Journal, Washington Post and other national newspapers and magazines. We also subscribe to Consumer Reports so our patrons have free access to the paid content on their website. Our patrons also have free access to Ancestry.com at the Research Station in our Reference Department.

New electronic resources we subscribed to this year are Lynda.com and Flipster. Lynda.com is an extremely popular fee-based collection of web tutorials for technology training as well as other career development subjects. The Library has subscribed to this so it is free for our patrons to use. Flipster is a service that allows online access to print magazines. With Flipster you read the full magazine, just as you would if you were holding a physical copy of the print magazine. 59 magazines are now available through Flipster, covering a variety of subjects and interests. Staff Librarian Emily Carta recently recorded a segment on Flipster for Channel 18, which is now available on the Channel 18 website and on YouTube.

All of our electronic resources can be accessed on the Electronic Resources section of our webpage.

Fine Amnesty Update:

The Library's annual month-long Fine Amnesty & Canned Food Drive has moved from December to March, but we will be giving patrons another opportunity to eliminate their fines in December. This year we will be collaborating with the Harwich Fire and Police Associations for their "Homeless for the Holidays" event in Brooks Park the first week of December. Community members who donate food at that event will receive a bookmark they can bring to the Library and we will waive any late fees on their account.

Statistics:

A full page of statistics is included at the end of this report, but we would like to highlight a few. Today there are 13,801 Brooks Free Library cardholders 9,950 of whom are full-time Harwich residents (both up over 4% over prior year). As expected, our extended closures hurt our circulation counts. While we offered a small browsing collection and the ability to pick up holds, as closures wore on patrons began using other libraries and each closure was followed by a residual effect of circulation being down the following month. It took some time for the word to get out that we had re-opened and for patrons to stop using the library they'd migrated to and return to their "home library." Last year 229,141 physical items were checked out, a decrease of 3.8%. With two more closures to date in FY17 we expect this year's circulation statistics to be similarly affected. Use of electronic resources was up sharply, however, with a 31.6% increase. This is also not surprising as it's in keeping with the national trend of decreasing use of physical items and more demand for electronic resources. We responded to 17,770 reference questions, a 5.5% increase over the prior year. We provided 951 programs, which attracted 12,617 attendees. With the restored Monday hours last year, we added an additional children's program in the morning and youth activity in the afternoon, so programs for both of those age groups saw significant increases.

Friends and Volunteers

Finally, we would like to thank the Friends of the Brooks Free Library who generously give of their time and effort to help us meet the needs of the community. They provide the funds that pay for passes that provide free or discounted admission to museums and attractions and additional copies of bestsellers, and they support the VITAL program and Summer Reading Program. They also run our Books on Wheels homebound delivery program and provide the "First Sunday" series of concerts, performances and lectures from September through June.

The Library also benefits from the services of numerous volunteers. Last year 80 community members volunteered at the Library, performing over 3,516 hours of volunteer service. Members of the Harwich Garden Club toiled many hours over this dry, hot summer caring for the beautiful garden in the island of our parking lot. The Chatham-Nauset Lions Club continues to be a great partner, supporting our VITAL program financially as well as serving as volunteer instructors. Without the support of these volunteers we would be unable to maintain the level of services we provide, so we greatly appreciate their efforts!

Respectfully Submitted,

Brooks Free Library Board of Trustees

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